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STUDIES IN THE SOCIAL
SIGNIFICANCE OF ADULT EDUCATION
IN THE UNITED STATES

A series of studies to be issued over a five-year period by the American Association for Adult Education with the aid of funds made available by the Carnegie Corporation of New York

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IN PREPARATION

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RURAL AMERICA READS

A STUDY OF RURAL LIBRARY SERVICE

BY MARION HUMBLE

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR ADULT EDUCATION

NEW YORK · 1938

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Preface

IF I were the owner of an orange grove in California or a migrant farm laborer following the fruit-picking seasons from one end of that state to another; if I were a sharecropper in the cotton country or a Negro teacher in a rural southern school; if I were a dairy farmer in Wisconsin, a fruit farmer in Vermont, a successful tenant farmer in one state, or a destitute tenant farmer in another; if I were a preacher in the mountains of Kentucky, a county home demonstration agent, a grange leader—if I were one of these or a dweller of any other sort in rural America, what might I want or expect from public libraries? What would they mean to me and to my family? Would they provide us with education, recreation, information, help in solving our problems?

It was with questions such as these in my mind that I began my study of the educational aspects of the work done with adults by rural libraries. I wanted to know how and to what extent these libraries were participating in programs of adult education provided for rural communities by various organizations. I was curious to learn what new demands for library services have grown out of the Cooperative Extension Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, and out of the educa-

tional work of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Works Progress Administration. Finally, I was eager to discover what forms of educational work libraries themselves are conducting.

My time for visiting libraries and gathering data on these points was limited to two or three months. Obviously, it was impossible for me in that time to attempt an inclusive study of rural libraries.¹ I have, however, tried to see all the major types of libraries that serve rural districts: regional libraries; state libraries; county libraries; township libraries; school district libraries; village libraries; library branches and stations in farmhouses, schoolhouses, country stores, village halls, and post offices. I have tried also to gather information concerning various special library services, such as the radio book service of the Iowa State College of Agriculture; the direct mail service and reading courses of Wisconsin and of Oregon; the pack-horse libraries of Kentucky; and the library extension work of various states and of the Berea (Kentucky) College Library.

I have been to New England, to California, to the deep South, to the Middle West, and to sections in between, journeying by train, by bus, by book wagon, sharing automobiles with librarians, home demonstration agents, teachers, country preachers.

¹ There are several excellent studies of rural libraries that give details and statistics which this study does not attempt to include. Especially comprehensive are *Countrywide Library Service* by Ethel M. Fair (American Library Association, 1934); *Libraries of the South* by Tommie Dora Barker (American Library Association, 1936); *County Library Service in the South* by Louis R. Wilson and Edward A. Wight (University of Chicago Press, 1935); also chapters in *Rural Adult Education* by Benson Y. Landis and John D. Willard (Macmillan, 1933); *Rural Trends in Depression Years* by Edmund deS. Brunner and Irving Lorge (Columbia University Press, 1937); and *Rural Social Trends* by Brunner and J. H. Kolb (McGraw-Hill, 1933).

I have talked with all these; with leaders of agricultural extension and university extension; and with men and women on farms, in villages, and at rural meetings.

As I recall what I have seen and heard during my visits to the different sections of the country, there stands out clearly in my mind one salient characteristic of all the libraries that seem to me to be giving distinctly educational service. The emphasis of these libraries is not on mere circulation of books; their main effort is consciously directed toward stimulating interests of individuals in ways that will contribute to their mental growth. Librarians who are educators are concerned not so much with reading per se—either with or without a purpose!—as they are with creating a desire for knowledge and understanding and with helping people to see that books are a means of satisfying this desire. In other words, I believe that education through libraries does not begin until librarians learn to look upon the reading of books as means to an end and not an end in itself.

To the many friends who have generously found time in the midst of their busy days to share ideas with me, to guide my travels, to supply me with information and materials, and to make opportunities for me to see and take part in library activities, I am forever in debt. And I gratefully acknowledge helpful counsel in regard to the preparation of this manuscript received from Morse A. Cartwright, Director of the American Association for Adult Education, and from Mary L. Ely, wise and sensitive editor; from Jennie M. Flexner, Readers' Adviser, of the New York Public Library; and from Dan Dodson, of New York University.

MARION HUMBLE

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Rural Library Resources

IT was a village librarian who collected the data for the first social survey of a rural community ever made in this country. When Charles J. Galpin, who was connected for many years with the United States Bureau of Agricultural Economics, first became interested in making a study of the influence of social forces upon farm life, he enlisted the help of the librarian of Belleville, New York, a community of six hundred people. Under Mr. Galpin's direction the librarian gathered the facts for road maps of the village and surrounding country and compiled information in regard to the homes and the various social agencies operating in the vicinity. Among the agencies that were treated as important to rural people was the public library.

Some thirty-two million people live on American farms, and twenty million more live in villages of less than twenty-five hundred inhabitants. According to an estimate made by the American Library Association in 1936, at least seventy-five per cent of these people in the open country and the small agricultural villages were then without public libraries.¹

¹ *The Equal Chance—Books Help to Make It.* American Library Association, 1936.

INDEPENDENT VILLAGE LIBRARIES

In hundreds of villages where independent libraries have been established, the library service is entirely inadequate to the needs of the people. These tiny libraries struggle along as best they can, unencouraged by community interest or respect, arrested in their development by the meagerness of the financial support that they receive. Some of them, like the Belleville Library referred to above, have had their beginnings in the civic consciousness and educational ambitions of a local women's club or literary society and, under the sponsorship of these groups, have achieved a greater or less degree of social usefulness. There are even sporadic examples of village libraries which, under the wise direction of a librarian possessing rare qualities of leadership, have given notable service to their communities and earned well-merited distinction in the library world.

As a general rule, however, the collections of the small village libraries are made up of miscellaneous books, contributed from time to time as gifts. The libraries are open to the public for only a few irregular hours a week, sometimes in charge of members of the group that has assumed sponsorship for them; sometimes administered by a librarian who is paid a few dollars a month for her services. Scattered through many states, these poorly supported libraries are as uneconomical and inefficient as are most one-room schools; and undoubtedly their educational value is slight, if not altogether negligible.

UNIFIED LIBRARY SERVICES

In contrast to the isolated village libraries are the regional, county, and township library systems that are being developed through efforts to equalize educational opportunities by enlarg-

ing the basic units of taxation for schools and libraries. There has been rapid growth in the number of consolidated schools, central school districts, county libraries, and the more recently developed regional libraries, as this movement for equalization has gained headway.

Library-planning committees are now active in nearly every state. In Arkansas, where an appropriation of \$100,000 was made in 1937, county libraries are being built up with the assistance of the State Library Commission. In Ohio successive grants of \$100,000 and \$150,000 for biennial periods have provided for the extension of many county library activities and have made possible experimentation with regional libraries. In Michigan an annual grant of \$500,000 for library extension is administered by a newly created State Board for Libraries. In Vermont, with a grant of \$25,000, the Free Public Library Commission is developing four regional libraries as part of a "Better Library Movement," conducted by the citizens.

County library systems are one of the earliest forms of unification. Such a system was started in California nearly thirty years ago, with the passage of a county library law in 1909. In the beginning, the county system was an extension of the state library, then under the administration of James L. Gillis, who, before entering upon library work, had had years of experience in distribution and transportation with the Southern Pacific Railroad. There are now county libraries in forty-seven of California's fifty-eight counties. In Los Angeles County the Antelope Valley Regional Library, eighty miles away from the county library of which it is an offshoot, is itself the center for eighteen branches and stations that extend into the desert.

Several factors seem significant in accounting for the rapid

extension of the county library system in California: the state librarian's talent for selecting county librarians of more than usual ability; the previous establishment of professional libraries for teachers in every county, as required by law; the provision that county libraries be directly in charge of the county boards of supervisors who make the tax appropriations; the facilitation of interlibrary loans by means of a union catalogue at the state library, where all the resources of California libraries are indexed; and, finally, the device of a uniform outdoor sign for county library branches and stations. More than four thousand of these signs, made of shining steel with bright orange borders, now serve as frequent reminders of libraries on road after road throughout the state, in front of post offices, country stores, farmhouses, schools, filling stations, and other buildings that shelter collections of books.

The unified county library system of California has suggested much of the plan of organization followed by the Louisiana Library Commission. A new project of the Louisiana Commission, launched in July, 1937, is a Tri-Parish Demonstration, made possible by an appropriation of \$15,000 from the treasury of the Commission and a \$10,000 stock of books provided by the State Board of Education. Winn, Grant, and Jackson Parishes were selected as the locale for this experiment because none of these parishes had a parish library. It was hoped that a successful demonstration of the value of library service there would help to convince the state legislature of the wisdom of making a grant for state-wide library extension through twelve regional centers. The importance of the state-wide education of taxpayers through the "Citizens' Library Movement" is seen in the appropriation in 1938 of \$200,000 for library development in Louisiana.

In general, the growth of county libraries in other states has not duplicated the experience of California. Although legislation permits the establishment of county libraries in nearly every state of the union, there are such libraries in less than ten per cent of the counties of the entire country. No doubt the slow advance in this direction is due in part to economic causes. Possibly it is also an indication that the county is not a suitable unit for effective library organization in most of the states.

Whatever the explanation, the recent trend in the unification of library service is toward strengthening and extending the work of state library agencies through legislation and appropriations. In all but two states there are state libraries, state library commissions, or library extension divisions of state departments of education, many of which distribute books by mail, by book automobiles, and through traveling library collections.

The central school district library, a more recent form of library unification, is well illustrated in New York State. As a result of pooled resources and the economies that have been effected by the federation of seven school district libraries, with headquarters in the Delmar Public Library, there are now available to both children and adults in those seven districts the services of trained librarians, a large central collection of books, and a book truck. Twenty-two hundred and fifty common school districts in New York State have been combined in about two hundred central districts. It seems probable that some form of school-community library will be adopted in many other districts of the state.

An interesting departure from the usual plan of centralization is the cooperative service of four public libraries in St. Louis County, Minnesota. Each library continues its independent existence, but the four have joined in a contract with the County

Board of Commissioners to supply library service to the rural people of the county.

Another cooperative enterprise has been started by the Fox River Valley Library Association in a homogeneous section of Wisconsin, north of Milwaukee. Nearly fifty libraries in the Fox River Valley have entered into an arrangement by which books are interchanged through an interloan service. Plans for the future include exchange of library assistants in order that they may broaden their experience. Cooperative buying, cataloguing, binding, and mending of books are also contemplated.

There are a few library services that reach beyond state borders. Notable examples are the libraries of the Tennessee Valley Authority, which serve seven states; the Vanderbilt University library for ministers in the South; the Radio Book Club of the Iowa College of Agriculture; the Extension Service of the Berea (Kentucky) College Library; and the package libraries of the American Hospital Association, which are sent by mail to physicians and nurses in rural communities.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PROJECTS

The county library of Shawano, Wisconsin, now more than three years old, offers an excellent illustration of some of the ways in which the relief projects of the Federal Government are augmenting the library resources of rural America. Shawano County is farming country, dependent chiefly on dairying and cheese making. A high percentage of the population is of German and Norwegian descent.

The Shawano Public Library, situated in the county seat, a town of four thousand people, was opened forty years ago through the combined efforts of the Shawano Woman's Club

and a group of forward-looking businessmen. Rooms in the county bank building were provided for library use, and an appropriation of \$25 a month was made by the City Council. These funds were supplemented by proceeds from benefits held by the Woman's Club. Civic interest and pride led to the construction of a library building in 1916. The Wisconsin Free Library Commission and the Carnegie Corporation of New York contributed to the building fund appropriated by the city.

By this time, the interest and activities of a few "library-minded" men and women had resulted in the establishment of two other libraries in the county, one at Tigerton and the other at Wittenberg. Each of these villages had a population of about eight hundred, and their collections of books were naturally small. Additions were made to them by loans from the traveling libraries of the State Library Commission, which sent books also to clubs and schools at other points in the county. But though members of the Shawano Woman's Club had been talking for years about the need for a centralized library service covering the entire county, many of the thirty-one thousand people of the county did not have access to books. The annual appropriation for the Shawano Public Library was not sufficient for the extension of its service beyond the town limits. Since there was comparatively little taxable land in the county, it could hardly be hoped that a campaign to enlist county tax support, even if it were successful, would yield enough to provide adequate library service. There seemed to be no real solution to the problem.

But Shawano was fortunate in having a true leader in the librarian of its public library, an active member of the Woman's Club, a woman who had grown up on a farm in an adjoining

county and who, after an education for business and some experience in it, had taken a summer course of training in the Library School of the University of Wisconsin. With other members of the Woman's Club, she was eagerly on the lookout for any opportunity that might make it possible to develop library service for rural residents of the county.

At last the opportunity presented itself. One cold night in the winter of 1933, a woman and three children came into the library. The mother said that they had walked ten miles and that she was badly in need of work. The librarian found temporary quarters for the family. The next day she went to the head of the County Welfare Board and told him that she would give the woman work in the library if maintenance could be provided for her. The maintenance was promised, and the woman was put to work. Mending books, arranging books and cards, typing, and other clerical tasks were turned over to her, the librarian and her assistant thus being relieved of many hours of detail work.

A few months later roles were reversed, when the head of the Welfare Board appealed to the librarian for help in solving one of his problems. He had applications for work from sixteen women who were eligible for relief and who were able to work. Could the library use them? Such an offer to a small library would ordinarily be overwhelming, but the librarian and trustees of the Shawano Library saw in it the very opportunity for which they had been waiting. They talked with leaders in the Woman's Club and with influential persons throughout the county, advocating the setting up of a county library system with custodians for the branch libraries provided by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. The proposal was greeted with enthusiasm. In ten villages there were formed groups of

sponsors who agreed to furnish rooms and equipment. Five new federated women's clubs were organized, with the sponsorship of libraries as their chief objective.

The Shawano Public Library became the center for the collection and distribution of books. The Traveling Library Department of the State Library Commission sent a permanent loan of one thousand volumes; a neighboring city library contributed several hundred books of which it had duplicates; and, through a book drive, four thousand additional books were obtained as gifts from the more prosperous homes in the county. And so the Shawano County Library, so long desired, became a reality.

By the end of the first year of the experiment, the County Board was so greatly impressed by the eagerness with which the people had responded to the new county-wide library service that an appropriation of \$3,000 was made for books and supplies. The appropriation was renewed in 1936 and increased to \$3,500 in November, 1937.

Today there are seventeen branches of the Shawano County Library. In August, 1937, the Works Progress Administration, successor to the Federal Emergency Relief Administration as the source of federal aid, withdrew its support without explanation. For several months the local groups of sponsors and the local custodians carried on the project, with no assurance as to its future. The increased appropriation from the County Board in November, 1937, and the restoration of W.P.A. support in eight communities put the libraries again upon a fairly secure foundation. The nine other communities are now paying their own custodians. As the Shawano librarian says, "The people are determined to keep the libraries alive. We no longer need to sell

the library idea to them. We can't begin to keep up with the demands made upon us. We need more books and a larger staff."

The communities of Tigerton and Wittenberg, with their long-established libraries, have joined the county plan. The village of Wittenberg has built a compact little library building, which has been furnished and equipped by members and friends of the library board. Library sponsors in other villages include the American Legion Auxiliary in Mattoon, which allows the library to occupy one end of the Legion building; the Lions' Club of Birnamwood; the Progressive Club of Leopolis; the Advancement Association of Navarino; and several women's clubs.

The committee of sponsors for the county system is made up of forty-seven men and fourteen women, whole-hearted "volunteers" in library extension. One member of the committee, who is the chairman of the County Probation Board, attributes a seventy-five per cent decrease in juvenile delinquency to the establishment of the county libraries.

The library custodians are women of varied backgrounds. There are some who have had courses in normal schools; some have had training and experience in teaching kindergarten. One is a woman who is supporting five children; another has a twelve-year-old boy in school; still another supports an invalid husband. Two women who were qualified to take charge of libraries, but who lived in villages where there were no libraries, were moved to other places, in which their services could be used. The libraries and librarians are tax-supported, and the attitude of the public toward them is unaffected by the source of that support; whether it is the federal, state, or county branch of the government that supplies the funds makes no difference.

During the third year of the Shawano County Library service, eighty-seven thousand books were borrowed by nearly five thousand persons registered in the branch libraries. Though a well-rounded collection of books is the ultimate aim of the librarian, she has made her first purchases with the specific purpose of introducing people to the pleasures of reading. Books requested for reference use or those wanted for particular kinds of information are borrowed from the central library or from the State Library Commission. A special effort is being made to instill a taste for reading in children by purchasing plenty of the best books for them. A former professor in the University of Heidelberg selects the German books that are bought, a volunteer service of great value.

The librarian talks about library facilities at meetings of teachers, leaders of 4-H clubs, homemaker clubs, women's clubs, and service clubs and asks them to suggest books that they need in their work. A few persons have expressed interest in organizing book-review clubs. It is hoped that several such groups can be formed in Shawano and that later there will be one in every community where there is a library. The county librarian is looking for leaders who will help her in this next project. As she says, qualified leaders are not easy to find in a small community; but she adds characteristically, "How is one to know that they do *not* exist, unless one really looks for them? I am doing just that."

Another example of the benefits that have been conferred upon rural libraries through the operation of the W.P.A. is supplied by the experience of New Jersey. In that state the administration of all work done in libraries under the auspices of the W.P.A. is handled through the office of the Public Library

Commission. Four hundred men and women have been placed in libraries or given employment at the headquarters of the Commission. Through centralization of the records of workers and careful selection of individuals to fit the jobs to be done, a superior quality of service has been maintained.

The secretary of the Library Commission states that library service to thousands of persons in rural communities of New Jersey is absolutely dependent on the employment of W.P.A. workers. Twenty-one emergency libraries have been opened in communities that suffered so greatly from unemployment that they could not have supported any library service at all without this assistance. Citizens of the communities have provided rooms and shelving for the libraries; have raised money for heat, light, and janitor service; and have borrowed books from the State Library Commission. Through the Commission more than one hundred thousand books have been collected in book drives, and W.P.A. helpers have cleaned and mended them and put them into circulation. The acquisition of these books has been a tremendous help during the years when funds for purchasing books were being severely curtailed. A union catalogue of all the books in the county libraries is being made at state headquarters in order to facilitate service to rural communities through an interloan system. School libraries in one hundred and thirty schools have been classified and catalogued with W.P.A. help.

The National Youth Administration, which has been conducting a relief program for young people since 1935, is another project of the Federal Government that has given invaluable aid to rural libraries. A recent report of the N.Y.A. lists one hundred and fifty-two rural library enterprises in forty-three states, in which approximately eight thousand young people have been employed.

In New York State the N.Y.A. started its rural library service in March, 1936, with the director of the Library Extension Division of the State Education Department as sponsor. The two main objectives of the service were to give employment to young people as library helpers in established libraries and to provide library service in communities that had no public libraries. The plan required the sponsorship of new libraries by local committees, with the expectation that these committees would build up community interest in the libraries sufficient to ensure their continuance through local support when the assistance of the N.Y.A. should be withdrawn.

The state supervisor of the service was a librarian experienced in extension work. District supervisors organized in every county a rural library committee made up of representatives of the 4-H clubs, the grange, the parent-teacher association, the farm bureau, the home demonstration service, and various service clubs. Wherever possible, young people whose families were on relief, and who were therefore eligible for N.Y.A. jobs, were assigned to established libraries for apprenticeship training.

The state parent-teacher association took charge of organizing committees for N.Y.A. sponsorship. The American Association of University Women was charged with the work of collecting books. The American Legion Auxiliary assumed responsibility for getting the money needed for library supplies, for book repairs, and for keeping the records of books.

One of the first activities of the service was a state-wide Give-a-Book Campaign, in which thousands of books were collected. The campaign undoubtedly had great publicity value; through it very many persons were awakened to the lack of public library facilities in their own communities.

The public libraries of Schenectady and Scotia have devised a unique plan for extending service to rural residents of Schenectady County. The plan is directed by the librarians and the library supervisor of the N.Y.A. in Schenectady, cooperating with a committee that is composed of representatives of a dozen of the most important social and educational organizations in the county. Each of these organizations supplies the headquarters office with the names of its members living in the country who want library service. Lists of books recommended by the various organizations are also given to the supervisor.

In each community eight young people, enlisted in the service, are detailed to call at rural homes and collect the requests for books. Each youth covers, either on foot or by bicycle, the territory within a radius of a mile and a half from his own home. The requests for books are mailed every week to headquarters, where they are filled from the two public libraries and the N.Y.A. library, which is made up of books assembled through several book drives. The books are delivered by car to the messengers and are taken by them to the waiting borrowers. Books that have been read are collected when the new ones are delivered.

In the first eight months of this messenger service, nearly three thousand books were requested and one hundred and twenty-five families were served. The sponsors of the project hope that what is being achieved by means of it constitutes the foundation for a county library, which will at some future time be financed by a regular tax appropriation.

In Kentucky the secretary of the State Library Extension Division reports that, in the W.P.A. projects of that state, there are nearly one hundred pack-horse librarians carrying books and

periodicals to remote mountain cabins. Picture and story magazines, many of them gifts from the mission schools, are always in demand. Frequently, the library messenger leaves books for the children to read aloud to their parents who can not read; often he himself stops to read aloud to a group and to talk with them about books. Some of these "pack-horse librarians" travel on foot or by bus or car; some of them ride borrowed horses.

Through all these different library systems in which the resources of libraries are combined, books are being carried to men and women in small villages and on farms in many sections of our country. So eagerly do these people receive the information and ideas that the books convey, so appreciative are they of the service given, that librarians are no longer asking themselves, "How can we induce people to read?" but rather, "How can we get books enough to answer need and desire?"

For the millions of rural people who are still without libraries, the recommendations of the President's Advisory Committee on Education, submitted to Congress in February, 1938, offer hope for increased opportunities in the future. To provide for the extension of library service to rural areas, the Committee recommends special federal grants to the states, in amounts totaling thirty million dollars in the next seven years. Grants of from five million to fifteen million dollars annually for adult education, and grants for the improvement of school and community-center activities, also recommended, will benefit rural districts, if made.

Roads to Reading

WITH inadequate book supplies and insufficient staff, it is not surprising that many rural librarians find themselves "too busy" to experiment with new methods of arousing interest in reading. Some of them are inclined to regard such methods as merely spectacular stunts rather than as opportunities to travel with readers to fresh fields of interest.

There is no particular ingenuity required to interest people in reading best sellers and other books that are repeatedly reviewed in radio programs and in the book-review columns of newspapers and magazines. But there are always worth-while books that do not find the readers they deserve. Many of these books, even truly important ones, the librarian with a rural clientele may decide not to buy because he thinks that they will not be read in his community. Or, if he does buy them, they may remain unread even though he does all he can to make them known—routes them to county book stations, sends them out on the bookmobile, includes them in newspaper book notes, reviews them in talks to leaders of study clubs. In such circumstances, the librarian must either admit defeat or have recourse to new methods of book publicity.

DISCUSSION

One of the means of bringing books and readers together that have proved effective in rural libraries is group discussion. It is a method that seems particularly appropriate to libraries because a good discussion not only stimulates "the desire for increased knowledge through reading and study"¹ but is also educative in itself.

In California, where books are widely accessible to the rural population through a well-organized county library system, one would expect to find that library discussion groups are frequently employed to encourage reading. That expectation is fully justified by the facts. In Los Angeles County alone there are forty branch libraries, some suburban, others rural, that are centers for discussion groups and for book-review clubs as well. An outline, suggesting the procedure for conducting discussion groups, was prepared several years ago by the Los Angeles County Library in cooperation with the California Association for Adult Education. This outline has been sent to all branch libraries, and further suggestions in regard to the organization of discussions are offered at the meetings of library custodians.

In the eastern part of Alameda County, also in California, the Sunol Branch of the county library is found in the living room of the librarian's own farm home, surrounded by a garden and a vineyard. More than three hundred readers are registered in this branch, most of them coming from vineyards or dairy farms.

Seven years ago a library discussion group was formed in Sunol, with the local parent-teacher association as its sponsor. Meetings of the group are held twice a month, usually with

¹ Thomas Fansler, *Discussion Methods for Adult Groups*, p. 65. A.A.A.E., 1934.

eight or ten members on hand. Regular household duties, special work in the canning season or at other particularly busy times, illness and other emergencies combine to make attendance records less than perfect, but interest in the discussions has been sustained year after year.

In the beginning, the group decided that they wanted to review new books and also to study contemporary history in order that they might gain a clearer understanding of current national and international problems than solitary reading is likely to give. Books of fiction, biography, and psychology have been most frequently chosen for review. War debts, Nazism, the political and territorial ambitions of Japan, the control of adolescent delinquency, the increase of educational opportunities through the aid of the Federal Government are a few of the many problems that have been tackled.

Often members of the group bring their violins, and an informal musicale preceding the discussion helps to enliven the meetings and to dispel any feeling of diffidence that might prevent the free expression of opinion.

At the San Lorenzo Branch Library, in Alameda County, another discussion group that was started several years ago is still active. Like many such enterprises, it has had its ups and downs. For a time the librarian was discouraged because one member of the group persisted in holding the floor and talking about labor problems to the exclusion of everyone else who had something to say and of every other subject that the group wanted to discuss.

Brighter prospects for the current year were indicated by what happened at one of the early fall meetings, which the librarian described to me in detail. Only a few persons were present, but their divergent points of view resulted in a lively session. Upon

this occasion the labor-union enthusiast did not succeed in capturing the discussion. Even though the meeting began with an argument about strikes, interest was soon transferred to a magazine article that one of the members had recently read. The article, which had appeared in *Readers' Digest*, was an attack upon optometry, and one of the members of the group, an optometrist, was asked to comment upon it. He did so at some length and then got out a pencil and proceeded to explain, with illustrative diagrams, the more common causes of defective vision. Every one was so completely absorbed in this subject that time passed unnoticed, and the end of the discussion period came far too soon. Before the group disbanded, each member chose a book to review at the next meeting. The "labor-union fan," as the librarian called him, took *400,000,000 Customers* by Carl Crow; a manager of a flower shop, *Down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico* by Susan S. Magoffin; a housewife, *Life with Mother* by Clarence Day; and the optometrist, *Co-op* by Upton Sinclair.

In the library of Waupun, Wisconsin, there is a successful discussion group that was not a book-publicity effort but had its origin in the librarian's concern over the young people in the town—most of them high school or college graduates—who were unable to find jobs. She suggested the organization of a discussion group, thinking that it might supply the youngsters with an intellectual and social interest which would help to tide them over the trying time of their involuntary idleness and might help them understand some of the social causes of unemployment. As the original members of the group, one by one, found work or moved away from the town, older people became interested in the discussions and carried them on. The group now meets regularly every alternate Tuesday evening. Even during

the summer months the meetings continue, with a six-o'clock picnic supper as a preliminary to an out-of-doors discussion.

The librarian, with a true sense of showmanship, provides an attractive setting wherever the group gathers. Indoors they meet in the basement room of the library where, when the weather permits, there is a fire in the open fireplace. Soft lights and comfortable chairs add to the inviting air of hospitality. In such surroundings even a timid newcomer soon loses his self-consciousness, and those who join the group protesting that they "can not talk in public" find themselves quite naturally taking part in the discussions. No one acts as leader or teacher; everyone just talks. The talk ranges over many subjects, from practical matters like socialized medicine and the Supreme Court issue to such philosophical questions as "Does the end justify the means?" One of the discussions that proved most interesting concerned various sources of information: newspapers, magazines, books, movies, the radio. Members of the group are encouraged to express their opinions freely, but it is expected that all information that is contributed shall be authentic, and the source of a fact cited is called for if anyone doubts its validity. This practice has tended to cultivate a fine habit of reading critically and of questioning the basis and the soundness of opinions and convictions.

The group is interestingly diversified in its make-up. It includes a minister, and his wife; the teacher of social science in the high school, and his wife; the secretary of the local Farm Loan Association, and his wife; a storekeeper who owns a farm at the edge of town, and his daughter; the director of education in the state prison; a doctor; and a psychologist. The achievements of the group have attracted the attention of the Agri-

cultural Extension Service of the University of Wisconsin, which is promoting discussion groups throughout the state.

The Waupun Public Library is liberal in its policies of book selection and book lending. There are no restrictions on the use of books by farmers who live beyond the town limits—an arrangement that has the approval of local merchants because the town is a trading center. The librarian's own wide range of interests is reflected in the books, periodicals, and pamphlets that she purchases for the library. Though she expresses concern because the collection is not used more fully, the Waupun Library is nevertheless one of the few libraries in Wisconsin that report an increase in circulation in recent years.

In studying discussion groups in rural libraries, it seemed to me reasonable to expect that I should find many of these libraries using the series of outlines prepared and published by the United States Department of Agriculture to promote and guide discussion of questions that are of outstanding importance to rural people. There are seventeen of these outlines in all. Written in readable nontechnical language, with numerous photographs and with pictorial statistics, they present each topic with which they deal from various points of view and provide accurate information as a basis for discussion. The American Library Association, impressed with the value of these outlines, sent to every state library agency practical suggestions for the use of the pamphlets by public libraries.

To my surprise and disappointment, I had almost reached the end of my travels and of my visits to rural libraries before I found one in which the outlines were in actual use. That library was the Hunterdon County Library in Flemington, New Jersey. There were twenty copies of each pamphlet on hand,

and Discussion Series No. 5, on the subject "Is Increased Efficiency in Farming Always a Good Thing?" was being used at the meeting of a grange group. It was an evening meeting held in the library headquarters, a room in the county court-house. Eight persons were present: four farmers, a teacher, a housewife, the librarian, and the library assistant. Each member of the group had been given a copy of the pamphlet at the preceding meeting, and each had already done some thinking on the subject. The leader started by reading, one at a time, the questions suggested in the pamphlet. The group was most informal, just a friendly gathering in a circle, each member contributing relevant items from his own experience. "Maybe *they* don't learn anything about farming in this county from these discussions," said the librarian, "but *I* always do!"

When a question on the tariff was read, no one volunteered to speak. After a few moments of silence, it was suggested that the librarian look up some information on the subject. "Right away?" she asked. "Right away!" they insisted. So she read aloud from the encyclopedia a brief history of the tariff.

A report of each group discussion is written by the librarian and is published, together with a summary of the conclusions reached, in four county newspapers. Through the publication of these reports and also because of the representative character of the meetings—the group of eight at Flemington was made up of members of several different granges—the influence of a single discussion may be wide. The persons who were in attendance at the Flemington meeting were making plans to start discussions in their several granges the following year.

A book group is another activity of the Hunterdon County Library in the field of informal discussion. The only formality connected with meetings of this group is the drawing of lots at

the opening of each session to determine which six of those present are to act as "starters." The group likes to talk about a variety of subjects. One meeting, for instance, began with a discussion of the relative merits of certain writers of detective stories. Brief talks on Maeterlinck's *Life of the Ant*, Paine's biography of Mark Twain, Mark Twain's own writings, and a book on glass collecting followed. A list of fifty-five books that were read and discussed in a single season by the county library book discussion groups has been published in the local newspaper. It is a surprising and even an exciting list from the point of view of the breadth of interests indicated.

Another small group of the Hunterdon County Library began by reading Lin Yutang's *My Country and My People* and then went on, with a retired professor of classical languages as leader, to discuss Chinese and Greek philosophy. Later, they held fortnightly dinner meetings, at which they read aloud from Plato's *Republic* and discussed it in relation to social problems of our own time.

These discussion groups are real experiments in stimulating the people of our democracy to think. It is to be regretted that more rural librarians are not conducting such experiments. Though group discussion seems to offer them an effective method of awakening interest in many subjects, I found this method being used in only a few rural communities, possibly because many librarians are too timid or reluctant to assume the necessary leadership.

AESTHETIC INTERESTS AND ACTIVITIES

In many farm communities the most popular fiction is that dealing either with life today or with pioneer life in the immediate locale. Caroline B. Sherman, of the United States Depart-

ment of Agriculture, recently called attention to the fact that "the rural novel is rapidly coming into its own as a recognized reflector of the true rural life and its traditions and changes."² Many rural librarians may fail to appreciate fully the social and artistic importance of fiction of this type, but very few of them are unaware of its efficacy as a means of attracting readers to their libraries.

Music provides another easy and pleasant way to gain the confidence and interest of country people. One of the most successful of county librarians has used his accordion to win friends for books. Roland Mulhauser, when he was librarian of Tompkins County, New York, was known throughout the state as the "librarian-troubadour." During his trips through the county on the library book truck, Mr. Mulhauser entertained more than a hundred meetings in a single year, and library activities showed a thirty per cent increase for that year. "Playing the accordion gives me a chance to get across to a lot of people a few ideas about books and the library," Mr. Mulhauser once explained to a newspaper reporter who asked him about his combined role of musician and librarian.

The Solano County Library, in California, lends song books, sheet music, phonograph records, and a portable phonograph to the people of the county. Three women's choral societies and a local choral club have given the library many sets of music. The Amijo Music Study Club also presents to the library all music bought with club money so that, after the club's first use of it, it will be available to everyone in the county. Through the cooperation of the county music supervisor, concerts and other musi-

² Caroline B. Sherman, "Rural Fiction as Interpreter of Rural Life," *Rural Sociology*, 2:36-45, March, 1937.

cal events in Solano County and in San Francisco and Sacramento are advertised in the library.

Architecture and gardening also help country librarians to establish themselves as part of their communities. Building a home or planning and cultivating a garden furnish a strong bond with neighbors. Two county librarians in California have recently taken root in that way. In McGraw, New York, the librarian planted a garden in the grounds around the library building and, through a common interest in bulbs and plants, led her readers to a study of flower arrangement. Gradually she has built up so excellent a collection of books on the subject that it is drawn upon by other libraries in the state.

The influence of the books on art and architecture read by country people is practical as well as aesthetic. In Louisiana the Webster Parish librarian points out in the new paper-mill town at Springhill numerous houses that have been built according to directions found in library books. Custodians of library stations in Los Angeles County, California, report that many of their readers have requested plans for small houses, in connection with the federal housing program. Books obtained from a branch of the Los Angeles County Library were the source of both the ideas and the working plans for an artcraft studio that one woman has set up in her garage. In Vermont a club leader tells of a successful college extension course in art that has created a demand for books on architecture, sculpture, graphic arts, painting, book design, and interior decoration. The books and book lists that are answering this demand are supplied by the new Rutland Regional Library and the Rutland Free Library.

Artists and writers have recently discovered the beauty of Hunterdon County, New Jersey, which is only two hours distant

from New York City. Numbers of them have settled there. The county librarian, learning of these new residents as she traveled around in a book van, invited the artists to exhibit their work in the county courthouse. A series of one-man shows was started in 1935, followed by other exhibitions, with informal talks on pictures.

Cape May County, New Jersey, is far off the beaten track, at the southern tip of the state. Until a county library was established at Cape May Court House, many of the residents of the county apparently had no idea of what books might mean to them. There is much interest in antiques here because many of the old homes possess objects of value and a number of antique dealers have opened shops in the district. The library has built up a special collection of books to help the owners of heirlooms identify and appreciate them and to assist the dealers in discovering rare items. The library possesses also an excellent collection of prints and art books of which it makes constant use. The librarian exhibits some of the prints in connection with her talks at club meetings and in schools. These prints are lent upon request to individual borrowers for home enjoyment.

County library art exhibitions are particularly important in communities where there are no private art galleries and museums. The Solano County Library, mentioned above, borrows a collection of etchings, lithographs, blockprints, and other prints from the Print Makers Society of California. This collection is shown annually and attracts much favorable attention. After the exhibition has been held at county headquarters, the prints are taken to each town in the county and are shown either in the community library or in a school assembly room. Several collections of prize-winning photographs, lent to the Solano

County Library by magazines upon invitation of the Camera Club of the county, have also been popular with the country people. Another art service of this library is the lending of pictures to schools, Sunday Schools, women's clubs, young people's societies, and other groups and to individuals for use in their homes.

Plays and play acting interest most human beings, whether they are young or old, city or country dwellers. This interest forms an easy approach to books, and enterprising librarians have made good use of it.

Many years ago, Mary Emogene Hazeltine, principal of the Library School of the University of Wisconsin, launched "dramatic readings" in Wisconsin. The enterprise had its beginning with a group of friends in Madison who met to read Shakespeare together. The readings were informal and solely for the enjoyment of the group. There was no audience.

On Washington's Birthday, in 1908, several members of this group gave a reading of Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple* at a celebration arranged by the Daughters of the American Revolution. The reading was given in the Guild Room of the Episcopal Church, and the rector of the church and several members of the University faculty were in the cast. The semipublic audience, made up of members of the D.A.R. and their invited guests, was delighted. Miss Hazeltine, in particular, was impressed by the performance, because she saw that dramatic readings of this kind would be an excellent method of creating interest in books, and she felt that they would therefore be a most appropriate activity for librarians. From that time she began to use dramatic readings with her students in the Library School and to encourage their use throughout the state. Maeterlinck's *Bluebird* was

the first play read at the Library School. *The Piper* by Josephine Dodge Daskam, Clyde Fitch's *Beau Brummel*, Sheridan's *The Rivals*, Parker's *Disraeli*, and Shaw's *Arms and the Man* were among the next ones presented. Nearly every year since then a new play has been read at the Library School; and the students, with help from the School, have organized dramatic readings in the communities where they have done their field work. Many groups and clubs in Wisconsin, and in other states as well, have adopted the idea and put it into practice.

The Library School, the Traveling Library Department of the Free Library Commission, and the Bureau of Dramatic Activities of the University Extension Division cooperate in preparing and lending plays for informal reading. From time to time lists of plays and suggestions for group readings are published in the *Wisconsin Library Bulletin*.

County and community libraries in various parts of the state have built up collections of plays and program materials to fill the demands from organizations. The Winnebago County Library at Oshkosh makes constant use of the catalogues of publishers of plays. The most active collection in the Oshkosh Library is the file of entertainment material. Three-act plays are most in demand. Granges, 4-H clubs, church societies, community clubs, women's organizations, schools, and W.P.A. drama groups are the most frequent borrowers.

In Burlington, Vermont, the librarian tells of a group called "The Neighbors," which gave dramatic readings of Shakespeare's plays fifty years ago and which is still in existence. Today new members are reading new plays. The club buys several copies of each play read and later deposits them in the library. A little theatre group does likewise, and the library now possesses one

of the best drama collections in New England. Many libraries borrow from it through an interlibrary loan service.

BY WAY OF RADIO

The increasing influence of radio upon reading habits and the choice of books is being felt in every section of the country. To the question, "Where do you hear about the books you ask for in the library?" farmers' wives, rural teachers, and club-women in small villages give the same reply, "Radio." Even in the poorest section of Kentucky, the mountaineers, when they get a little money ahead, buy radios—storage battery radios because rural electrification has not yet reached that part of the state. So the pack-horse librarians are not surprised at requests for *Gone with the Wind* and other best sellers that are reviewed on the air.

A recent survey made by the Publishers' Advertising Club of New York City disclosed nearly two hundred radio stations that broadcast book news or book reviews. Some of the programs are syndicated book reviews by newspaper writers or the editors of woman's pages. Other programs merely include notes on books as one of several features. Libraries, universities, and bookstores sometimes broadcast interviews with authors, story hours, and readings from books, as well as book reviews. The sponsor of Alexander Woollcott's broadcasts as "Town Crier of the Air" was a commercial advertiser who had no primary interest in creating a demand for books; but one bookseller, after counting up the sales resulting from Mr. Woollcott's comments on books, suggested that the best way to make people buy books would be to "have Alexander Woollcott like all books" and tell about them over the air.

The Northwestern University Bookshelf, broadcast by the University Broadcasting Council, Chicago, over the network of the Columbia Broadcasting System, presents a discussion of books by two members of the English Department of Northwestern University. Let's Read a Book is a regular feature of the daily noon broadcast of the Rural Education Division of the New York State Education Department. Book reviews are included in the weekly broadcast of the Utah Poultry Producers' Association, coming from Salt Lake City. The librarian of Winnebago County, Wisconsin, reports that she receives requests for books every week from members of the home demonstration clubs, who listen to the reviews broadcast on Friday from the station of the University of Wisconsin.

The School of Library Service of the University of Southern California is conducting a unique series of broadcasts on books, as a project in the course on Organization and Administration of Libraries. The students write the scripts in dramatized form and take part in the production, the director of the Library School acting as narrator and commentator. One of the sketches that have been given was entitled Curious Information; another, Business Information; and a third, Turning over a New Leaf in Reading.

The new radio program of the Massachusetts Library Association, which is designed to increase the use of all the libraries of the state and to create interest in specific books and authors, was begun early in 1936 as part of the W.P.A. recreational program in Boston. In the beginning, W.P.A. workers introduced members of the library staff, who gave book reviews over a local station. After a few months, authors were invited to give brief talks about their books, and a series of weekly fifteen-minute

programs, Meet the Author, was launched as an educational feature over a larger station. Responses from listeners in all parts of Massachusetts and in near-by states, and even from Nova Scotia, attested the popularity of these talks.

Though the discussions put on the air by America's Town Meeting of the Air, a weekly national broadcast from the Town Hall in New York City, seldom deal directly with the subject of books, these programs are undoubtedly exerting an influence upon the reading of people in all parts of the country. It was suggested that libraries set up Town Meeting bookshelves and bulletin boards and that they assume sponsorship of listening groups and of follow-up discussions. More than two hundred libraries responded favorably to this suggestion and signified their willingness to adopt the plan. Libraries are also encouraging the purchase of the verbatim reports of the broadcasts. Each of these reports includes a list of books prepared by the Readers' Adviser of the New York Public Library, who keeps rural communities especially in mind in compiling the lists because much of the "fan mail" received at the Town Hall comes from these communities. The books suggested in the Town Meeting bulletins, unlike the majority of books discussed and reviewed over the air, are distinctly intended for "serious readers." New books are included only when they directly pertain to the subjects of the broadcasts.

The programs of the Iowa State College of Agriculture, Station WOI, which are among the best known of the broadcasts dealing with books, were started as long ago as 1925. Initiated for the express purpose of stimulating interest in reading, they consisted at first of a weekly half-hour of reviews and summaries of books. The books selected for discussion were chosen with

a view to answering the plea for something that would "take people away from the drudgery of farm and house work." In 1928 the experiment of reading entire books aloud was tried. The careful selection of the books, the regularity of the reading—*every* weekday from nine to nine-thirty in the morning—and the ability of the reader to re-create the books she read seem to have been the main factors in the happy outcome of the experiment, which has been so successful that it has continued for ten years.

A few years ago the librarian of the College library made a study of the results of these broadcasts as shown in book sales and requests for books in Iowa libraries. Four hundred and seventy individual listeners replied, in answer to a questionnaire, that they had purchased 968 books solely as a result of the radio readings. Many of these books were bought for gifts. Two hundred and one librarians reported a marked increase in demand for the books read and the consequent purchase of 2,845 books, chiefly duplicates, that would not otherwise have been bought.

The following extracts from several hundred letters received by the college broadcasting station, WOI, from farms and small towns in Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, South Dakota, and Minnesota, give some indication of what the books mean to individuals and to families:

Those of the family who miss the half-hour are told the story later. My mending is always finished, and all the jobs that I detest I do during that half-hour: they do not seem so bad then.

When nine o'clock comes I take my mending and sewing, sometimes peel my potatoes, and sit down and look forward with the greatest of pleasure to that half-hour of reading. One of my boys has a paper

route, and on Saturday mornings when he collects for it he finds almost all the ladies on the route listening to the reading.

I got a lot of fun out of the last four or five books. I have to read so much from the newspapers to my father, who is ninety-six years old, that I revel in the happy, lighter things I get from you.

I've especially enjoyed the pioneer stories like *Turkey Red*, *Let the Hurricane Roar*, and the Minnesota pioneer story. I've heard many others say the same thing.

After hearing *Turkey Red* last fall, I selected it to give as a book review in our study club. Everyone enjoyed it so much; and a visitor from South Dakota borrowed it to give as a review in her home-town club.

The comments received are not invariably complimentary. One of the criticisms is particularly significant as pointing to a probable reason for the considerable decrease during the last two years in the circulation of the books read over the radio. The critic wrote:

I would like to make a suggestion. Why do you always read fiction and such light books? Why not biography and some heavier books? I realize that this change would not please everyone, but surely you could mix in some of the more meaty reading.

According to members of the library staff who select the books, the most popular stories are those dealing with the early days of Iowa. Next in popularity come books about the Middle West, love stories with happy endings, pioneer stories, and "fictionized" biographies. A definite effort is made to select books that will be suitable for persons of different ages because frequently all the members of a family listen in.

In addition to the daily reading aloud, WOI broadcasts short book notes and reviews of books of various types at regularly scheduled hours each week.

In 1930 the Radio Book Club was started by the College library in order to take care of increasing requests from radio listeners for the books that they had heard read aloud or recommended over the air. The Book Club, in reality a rental library established on a nonprofit basis, now has over 2,200 members and has circulated more than 37,000 books. Forty-one per cent of the members live on farms and in villages of Iowa where there are no public libraries; 34 per cent give addresses of towns that do have libraries; and 25 per cent live in neighboring states. One member has borrowed 300 books within six years. Membership is limited to persons living within 300 miles of Ames, the radius of the special library postal rate.

As there are radio sets on 60 per cent of Iowa farms, according to data assembled by the Iowa Department of Agriculture, it is conceivable that the impetus given to reading by the WOI broadcasts might be greatly increased if there were a continuous tie-up of the programs with libraries and bookstores in the state. The director of the station has tried the experiment of sending posters to 500 Iowa libraries and branch libraries, with a changeable panel for insertion of the name of the book being read currently. But funds apparently did not permit the further use of this special type of publicity.

The growth and continuance of these many and varied radio book programs appear to have resulted from genuine eagerness for book news on the part of radio listeners. Program directors report an immediate protest by mail whenever book-review features are temporarily withdrawn.

Many librarians, however, have been reluctant to stimulate a demand for books unless there is a fair chance that the demand can be met. If the practice of broadcasting book reviews and

book news keeps on growing, what will be the result? The influence of these programs will be largely wasted, as far as reading goes, unless the books can be made available. In small villages and rural districts, there are few bookstores and comparatively few persons who can afford to buy books or even to rent them. The Iowa Radio Club, offering a book-renting service, is to be congratulated upon having built up a membership of more than 2,200 within a period of seven years; but it seems probable that this number would be much greater if there were not some features of the plan that restrict its growth. Very likely, as has been suggested, the cost to the individual borrower is the main deterrent. And free library service can not at present solve the problem. Although village, county, and regional libraries and state library agencies are all doing their best to fill the requests for books that result from radio book talks, these libraries, too, are hampered in their book-buying by the lack of adequate funds.

The undeniably strong influence that broadcasts about books have upon the amount and character of the reading done by many thousands of radio listeners offers a challenge not only to librarians but also to all other educators.

Reading and Study

IN every rural community there are numbers of local groups and enterprises of an educational nature with which library agencies cooperate as fully as their resources permit. In addition, the educational programs of national, regional, state, and county organizations and institutions penetrate rural districts and offer librarians many and varied opportunities to relate reading to study. As one rural sociologist says, "There are dozens of doors at hand if librarians will only open them." Alert and social-minded librarians *are* opening these doors.

The county librarians of New Jersey, for instance, are members of the state grange, and at least one member of the New Jersey Library Commission is also a member of the national grange. The Commission participates actively in the educational work of the grange by supplying book lists and book exhibits in connection with lectures.

In Ventura County, California, the local branch of the American Association of University Women, of which the county librarian is a member, built its program for the year 1937-38 around some of the most interesting books in the Ventura County Library. The central theme of the program, "Recent Trends," was developed through the study of recent publications in the

fields of science, buying and selling, literature, education, philosophy, music, and drama.

The National Congress of Parents and Teachers has suggested that one of the topics assigned for discussion in the meetings of rural parent-teacher associations should be "reading and story-telling." In California the parent-teacher association gives practical help to the county libraries by urging all its members to become library borrowers. The libraries, in turn, help the association members by preparing special book lists for them and guiding their choice of books. Lists compiled by the California Library Association are frequently published in the *California Parent Teacher*. One of these lists, entitled "Skilful Parents," has been reprinted and used in the county libraries and rural library stations throughout California.

These examples of the cooperation of rural libraries and educational agencies in efforts to bring about a closer alliance between reading and study have been chosen more or less at random. Hundreds of others could be cited if there were space.

WOMEN'S CLUBS

The women's clubs of the country can not be passed over without some special notice, even though it be brief. Women's clubs have always been friends of libraries and have been befriended by them. Many libraries, particularly in rural districts and small towns, owe their inception to the activities of some women's club, zealous for the conservation and propagation of "culture." Often, too, libraries have given valuable assistance in the forming of a club. The head of the Traveling Library and Study Club Department of the Wisconsin Free Library Commission reports that not infrequently the organization of a

club is the direct result of one woman's dissatisfaction with the sort of social activities that are popular in small towns everywhere. Through personal persuasion, this woman enlists the interest of her friends in a proposed program of reading and study, but, in actually getting the club started and the program planned, it is the help of the library upon which she relies most heavily. In these clubs discussions of current economic, political, and social questions, which require a considerable amount of reading, are usually featured. The purely literary programs, once so much in vogue, are now a rarity.

Filling book requests from local study clubs and helping in the preparation of club programs are services that local libraries and state library agencies have rendered for years. The staff member of the Wisconsin Free Library Commission, quoted above, is chairman of the Fine Arts Department of the State Federation of Women's Clubs. Talks that she has given at club meetings have sometimes resulted in the development of an entire year's program out of interest in a single book. Nora Waln's *The House of Exile* thus furnished the starting point for the study of forty or fifty books on the history, culture, social life, and court life of China and on the present Chinese crisis. Similarly, Anne Morrow Lindbergh's *North to the Orient* led to the reading and study of books on the Orient and also on aviation. Hathaway's *Romance of the American Map* supplied the theme for a program in which thirty books on American pioneer life were read and discussed.

BOOK-REVIEW CLUBS

Book-review clubs are increasingly popular. In Cortland, New York, the meetings of a book-review club, which was started in

1931, have not only become important social functions of the town but have also extended their influence to many other villages in the Finger Lake District. Each year since the club was formed, twenty-five well-known citizens have been invited to serve on an advisory committee and to cooperate with the library in sponsorship of the project. The books to be reviewed are selected by this committee, with advice and assistance from the librarians. The monthly club meetings are held in the library auditorium.

The reviewers are chosen from many walks of life. During the last five years they have included a physician, a newspaper reporter, the head of the English Department in the Normal School, a bookseller, the secretary of the local Y.W.C.A., the superintendent of schools, the principal of a private school, the county health commissioner, editors, library trustees, and members of the Cortland club and of other clubs in near-by towns. A reviewer, attracting his own following, sometimes brings an entirely new group of persons to the library. For example, when an Italian attorney reviewed a book, there were in the audience many of his countrymen who had not previously visited the library. And when an official of the fire department was the chief speaker on the program, the whole fire department turned out. (Since the firehouse is directly across the street from the library, the safety of the town was not endangered!)

The Cortland club has greatly increased the use of the library, especially by men, and it has been the means of obtaining helpful library publicity in the newspapers, in the schools and churches, and at various gatherings. The books reviewed are always in demand for months following the club meetings. The review of one of Eugene O'Neill's books excited so much inter-

est that, by request, a Eugene O'Neill symposium was arranged and was later repeated as a demonstration in libraries of neighboring villages. The Department of Rural Social Organization of Cornell University has sent details of the Cortland project to communities in every section of the state, with the suggestion: "Ask your librarian to start one." Members of the Cortland advisory committee have helped to organize clubs in a number of other villages.

AMERICAN HOME ECONOMICS ASSOCIATION

Outstanding among the national organizations that are strongly influencing reading in rural districts is the American Home Economics Association, which has set up a committee with a cumbersome title but a clearly defined aim. The Committee on Home Economics in Education through Libraries explicitly states that it is not conducting a "campaign," but has formulated a "plan for permanent action," the object of which is to make reading and the use of libraries an integral part of education, along with instruction in cooking, sewing, and other homemaking activities. This program was started in nine states in 1937, and the work has already spread to nearly every state, carried on by home demonstration agents of the Agricultural Extension Service, home economics teachers, and librarians.

The originator and national chairman of the plan is the state home demonstration leader of California, a former county library organizer. The county home demonstration agents and county librarians in that state, working jointly under her guidance, have achieved notable results.

When the state librarian of California presented the plan to California librarians, she called their attention to the benefits

that libraries might expect to receive through its adoption and development: first, the support of leaders of active organized groups who would advise members of their groups to make use of the libraries; second, the acquisition of new readers whose interest at first might be limited to books on home economics, but who would eventually use other library services; and, third, the assistance of these new readers in efforts to obtain more adequate tax appropriations for library support.

In Solano County, California, the plan was put into operation in October, 1937. As a first move, the program and its purpose were fully explained to about four hundred farmers' wives who were meeting in the county community building for their annual "playday." Both the state librarian and the county librarian addressed the meeting, telling the women present that, through the cooperation of many teachers of home economics, extension workers, and librarians, there had been compiled a national list of books on "food and nutrition, clothing, shelter, health, and the social values," a list that would be especially helpful to rural women.

The Solano County librarian sent to each of the eleven home demonstration centers for their first meeting in the fall of 1937 a special book list and a corresponding collection of books, based upon the national list, with some additions from the book stock of the county library. The lists were arranged in an alphabetical series from A to K.

"List A" and the books listed were taken to the meeting of the farm bureau and the home department center, which I attended in Allendale in October, 1937. The Allendale library station is housed in the librarian's own farm home, where approximately four hundred books, shelved in her living room,

are available at all hours. Here a group of farmers' wives from turkey and fruit farms meets once a month to hold a brief business session and then listen to a talk given by the county home demonstration agent. At the October meeting there were twenty-seven members of the group in attendance. The program opened with a talk by the county librarian. She unpacked her carton of books, spread them invitingly on the library table, and distributed copies of List A to everyone. Then she talked about the books, reading from them here and there to amplify and enliven her comments. There were books on home economics, agriculture, biography, travel, history, and social science. Fiction was also included and some books that were particularly suitable for reading aloud to the family. The members of the group jotted down notes as the librarian talked. When she mentioned an especially alluring title, questions were asked about the book. A book on etiquette, one on consumer education, and one on cooperatives each brought forth several queries. The comments occasioned by the book on cooperatives led to a discussion of the marketing of turkeys through a cooperative association and an exchange of opinion concerning the recent opening of a cooperative refrigeration plant in the county. But the book that aroused the keenest interest of all was a new one telling about scientific experiments in telepathy.

The members of the group were asked to keep records of their own reading and of that done by others in their families. They were told that the books comprising List A would be left with them for several months and would then be replaced by another collection.

After the librarian's book talk, the county home demonstration agent spoke on the subject of cosmetics as related to health, psychology, and consumer education. In the last connection she

quoted at length from the *Consumers' Guide* published by the Consumers' Counsel of the United States Department of Agriculture. Although the very personal subject of the county agent's speech appealed to every woman present, the discussion that followed showed quite as much interest in the librarian's talk about books, and in the books themselves, as in cosmetics. All the books were borrowed at the close of the meeting.

One woman spoke most enthusiastically about the new plan for reading and about the work of the farm center. "If it weren't for these meetings, we'd slip back," she said. "We wouldn't know anything but farm work and house work."

In discussing the nomination to office of a woman who was expecting a baby before spring, another member of the group exclaimed, "Of course she can be vice-president even though she is going to have a baby. Having babies is no reason for neglecting our minds. As soon as the baby is old enough, she can bring him along. It will do him good."

At ten other centers in Solano County, where the plan is in operation, the women discuss books at each of their meetings just as I heard them doing at Allendale. Some report that they read the books aloud and that their husbands, too, are becoming interested in reading.

The county librarian has talked about books and the reading project to men at farm bureau centers, and new interests aroused by the talks have led them to ask for speakers on economics and travel at their meetings. These requests are being filled by the county librarian. The farm adviser expresses great satisfaction at this broadening of programs that were formerly devoted exclusively to agriculture.

In other California counties the reading project is being worked out in different ways. A committee in Merced County is

planning to reach every community in the county through parent-teacher association councils, granges, and leaders of 4-H clubs. Book reviews in newspapers and radio book talks are being used for publicity, and all teachers of home economics and all members of women's clubs in the county have been enlisted in support of the program.

In Fresno County demonstrations of the project have been set up in certain selected communities. Teachers of home economics in the local high schools act as community chairmen, and the principals of these schools serve as advisers.

Other states, too, have devised their own methods for developing the plan. In Louisiana, where the slogan Read for Home Happiness has been adopted, three objectives of the plan have been outlined: (1) to provide lists of books on home improvement and to promote the use of these books by members of federated clubs, parent-teacher associations, home demonstration councils, and other organizations; (2) to award "readers' diplomas," issued by the Louisiana Home Economics Association, to persons who have read a prescribed number of books on homemaking; (3) to supply programs based on books about homemaking to organizations that request them.

Read for Facts and for Fun is the slogan used in Nebraska, an agricultural state with few large cities and with an estimated fifty per cent of its population lacking local library service. There had been several years of carefully planned cooperation between the Nebraska Library Commission and the Home Extension study clubs in that state before this particular project was started. Recently, the secretary of the Library Commission has talked at meetings of the Organized Agriculture Group, and the state extension agent has talked at meetings of the State Library Association. During the summer of 1937, fifteen thou-

sand women who were enrolled in courses for leader training, conducted by the State Agricultural Extension Service, were told about the reading project by staff members of the State Library Commission. With this background of real participation by each group in programs of the other group, the reading program was formally launched at a September Rally Day. Nebraska uses six book lists, each giving the titles of about forty books. The books are classified under six heads: home economics, biography, travel, history, fiction, and children's books. Every participant in the project is asked to read at least six books and to choose them from three or more of the classes.

Many libraries are finding it difficult to supply the books in numbers sufficient to meet the demands, but it is hoped that eventually the support of libraries throughout the state will be strengthened as a result of these increased demands for books. At present, the Nebraska Library Commission lends the books to persons who can not get them from their local libraries.

The home demonstration agents of the United States Department of Agriculture and the rural librarians of the country have long worked closely together, but between librarians and the agricultural extension agents of the Department there has never been so mutually helpful a relationship. It does not seem over-optimistic to hope that the success of the program of "home economics in education through libraries" will prove to the extension agents how useful libraries might be to them in furthering the education of rural people.

CLOSE INTEGRATION OF READING AND STUDY

A long step in the direction of closer integration of reading and study, a step that may lead to a significant change in the status of rural libraries in New York State, was taken recently

when the Division of Adult Education and the Division of Library Extension of the New York State Department of Education were combined. At an initial Conference on Social Adult Education, held in Albany in 1937, one of the proposals made was that the new Division, created by the combination of the other two, should join with communities, organizations, and individuals "to study the problems and needs of rural areas in the field of adult education, and the possibility of regional or cooperative undertakings."

The Library Extension Division has been cooperating for years with rural organizations through traveling libraries sent to study clubs, granges, home bureaus, and families; through assistance given by field workers to libraries in villages and small towns; and through library institutes. Members of the staff of the Library Extension Division take part in the annual Farm and Home Week of the State Colleges of Agriculture and Home Economics. Book exhibits, book talks, and explanations of the work of the Library Extension Division are popular features of the programs provided at these gatherings. The new alliance of this Division with the Adult Education Division will almost certainly bring about some very important developments in rural adult education through the libraries in the state.

It is in the educational program of the Tennessee Valley Authority, however, that integration of the work of libraries with other agencies of adult education is really under way. The staff of the Training Section at the T.V.A. headquarters office in Knoxville consists of the General Supervisor of Library Service and other supervisors, each specially trained in his field. At every one of the construction centers there is a superintendent of education, who is assisted by various specialists in recreation

and education, among them the members of the library staff. In short, in the territory controlled by the T.V.A., library service and education do not run along parallel lines, as they do in most localities. The T.V.A. plan makes the library an indispensable part of the educational system.

Employees at the Guntersville Dam, Alabama, and on the clearance area above the dam are residents of three counties. Through a contract with the public library of Huntsville, Alabama, library service to communities in these three counties is being unified and vitalized, the T.V.A. assisting with finances and personnel. This assistance has enabled the Huntsville Library Board to expand its service greatly and to convert the Huntsville Library into a center for regional service. The promotional and extension work of the library are not looked upon as a temporary expedient, but have been planned in expectation of their continuance after T.V.A. operations shall have ceased. If these plans work out successfully, the Huntsville Library will remain permanently a regional library.

A branch of this library is an important feature of the community building at Guntersville Dam. The community building, with its rooms for games and recreation, its post office, auditorium, and classrooms, reminds one strongly of the War Camp Community buildings of 1917-18. The library circulates magazines, pamphlets, reports, and blueprints as well as books. Carefully annotated lists of books and pamphlets are prepared for each educational and job-training class, the librarians consulting with instructors in the choice of books. Book news sheets are distributed to classrooms, homes, and dormitories.

The community and school library at Norris, Tennessee, is the center of a half-dozen book-review clubs, with membership

among the families of men employed at Norris Dam and in the Knoxville offices of the T.V.A. The formation of these clubs has been due, in part at least, to the librarian's clever method of relating purchases of new books to the interests of the people in the community. A large box on the center table in the reading room invites suggestions of books to be purchased. The suggestions received are published in the local paper. So, too, is the list of new books when they arrive. Members of the book-review clubs frequently give volunteer service in the library, answering questions about books that they have read and encouraging further reading and discussion.

SPECIAL SERVICE TO TEACHERS

Great potentialities for the enrichment of education lie in providing inviting opportunities for teachers to read widely, by making easily available to them a liberal supply of good books, periodicals, and pamphlets.

The Los Angeles County Library, combined with the county teachers' professional library of 27,000 volumes, offers its entire resources, some 400,000 books and 32,000 pamphlets, to every teacher in the county. Books recently sent to teachers who are doing research work, taking extension courses, building curricula, or planning new class activities include material on "new methods in teaching reading, the cooperative movement and the school, projects in science courses, designs for art work, school-building architecture, dietetics and nutrition, preparation of educational statistics, planning school libraries." A monthly *Book News* sheet, prepared by the library, is sent from the county school superintendent's office to all schools in the county. One of the most successful means of promoting the use of pamphlets and helping teachers to build up their own pamphlet collections

was an exhibit held at one of the county teachers' institutes. Very useful, too, was an eight-page leaflet, entitled "A Library for the Asking," which told where pamphlets could be obtained and gave a list of pamphlets especially helpful to teachers, together with directions for organizing a schoolroom pamphlet file.

Numerous means are employed by educational and library agencies to add to the intellectual pleasure and profit that teachers gain from their reading. Examples are the courses in Children's Literature and Adolescent Literature, given at the University of Minnesota by Dora Smith, and her book lists for teachers; the Teachers' Reading Circles in Wisconsin; the book lists for rural teachers that have been prepared by the Division of Rural Education and the Library Extension Division of the New York State Department of Education; and the regular book-review meetings that are held for rural teachers in New York.

Special hospitality offered by libraries to teachers is also effective. The Winnebago County Library in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, keeps open house for teachers on Saturday mornings. The county librarian tries to have new books ready for them every Saturday, and a display of work from some school is always arranged for special interest. But many librarians have erected a barrier between teachers and books by not providing service to teachers on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. Though there are, of course, financial reasons for this practice, it is usually as unnecessary as it is unwise. Even in small communities where funds are insufficient to pay for keeping the library open seven days a week, there are almost always willing volunteers who are glad to take charge of the library when the regular librarian is having her well-deserved intervals of rest and recreation.

The project method of teaching and the building of new cur-

ricula have sent an increasing number of teachers to libraries in the last few years. But their own professional problems are not the only ones that rural teachers are called upon to solve. They are often appealed to by members of their community, adults as well as children, for light upon the problems of daily living. Teachers who have learned to use books and libraries know the worth of the help to be derived from these sources. They know, too, where such help can be obtained from local libraries and through library extension services. And so, inevitably, they, who are beneficiaries of libraries, become missionaries for libraries.

Who doubts that librarians and teachers can be, and should be, and very often are, helpful to one another? Who questions the mutually stimulating relationship that subsists between reading and study? Nevertheless, there is always a curious satisfaction in discovering newly convincing proof of something that we have already accepted as true.

Behind the Books

THE supervisor of Library Service of the Tennessee Valley Authority suggests five important contributions "on behalf of the nation's welfare" that rural libraries might reasonably be expected to make: "(1) to increase the efficiency of farmers at their jobs; (2) to help them preserve and enrich the soil which is the nation's heritage; (3) to promote their intelligent participation in the duties of citizenship; (4) to advance wholesome family life; (5) to contribute to the individual's adjustment to his environment."¹

Undoubtedly, the rural library agencies are in a strategic position to play a significant part in the education of rural citizens, but in order to realize their full potentialities these agencies must have not only adequate material resources but also a competent personnel. Back of every collection of books is the librarian who selects them and directs their use. Even the most up-to-date and comprehensive collection of books may remain comparatively inert and unused if the librarians in charge are not persons of social vision, who possess faith in their libraries as educational institutions; see and understand the

¹ Mary U. Rothrock, "Objectives for Rural Library Service." *Rural America*, 15: 6-9, September, 1937.

educational needs of their communities; and, perhaps most important of all, realize their own need of continuing education.

Formal education of ten or twenty years ago afforded little preparation for comprehending and dealing with the social and educational problems of today. Librarians read widely—or should do so—and the majority of them are therefore probably better informed about changing social conditions than many other professional workers are. But wide reading does not always result in understanding.

The custodians of small units of a county, regional, or state library system frequently suffer from a handicap that is less often a problem in the urban library today. The rural library custodians often lack training. Conferences of the American Library Association; the meetings of state library associations; library institutes of the kind conducted every year by the New York Library Association; group discussions, such as those carried on by the San Francisco Bay District Library Discussion Group; and regular staff meetings of librarians and custodians, which are held in most county and regional libraries, are some of the forms of in-service training that have been developed to help rural librarians overcome their special difficulties.

IN-SERVICE TRAINING FOR LIBRARIANS

The New York State Library Institutes furnish one of the best examples of professional education of rural librarians while they are working. Since 1902, one-day conferences, under the sponsorship of the Library Extension Division of the State Department of Education, have been held in every section of the state for the discussion of library problems by librarians, library trustees, teachers, and school superintendents. As an extension

of these short institutes, the Library Association and the Library Extension Division, every year since 1928, have jointly conducted one-week institutes, offering courses in different phases of library work. These courses have been planned to supplement one another, so that, by attending the institutes year after year, a librarian who can not afford the cost of residence study at one of the library schools may acquire training equivalent to that given in the six-week summer sessions of these schools. Each institute is conducted by an experienced librarian associated with the Library Extension Division. The subjects studied to date have included Adult Education, The Library and the Patron, Book Selection, Administration, Cataloguing, and Children's Work.

In 1937 one-week institutes were held at six centers, widely separated geographically. Eighty-seven librarians were enrolled; and more than one hundred guests, chiefly trustees and teachers, were in attendance. Many of the students came from the smallest villages. One librarian reported that her budget for books is only \$50 a year and that her annual salary is \$98. In each of the six groups about fifty per cent of the students were middle-aged or older. Several had attended six or seven consecutive institutes, thus gaining, after years of library experience, the refreshment of new ideas and new contacts. Twelve of the librarians enrolled in 1937 were college graduates, two held master's degrees, and fifteen others had had some college work.

Additional incentive to continue their professional education is given to New York librarians by the State Library Association, which provides awards and scholarships for members with limited incomes who "have given service worthy of recognition." The scholarships cover the cost of summer school courses at

library schools within the state. Special awards provide for the expense of attendance at the annual conference of the State Library Association.

Minnesota and North Dakota librarians returned to classrooms on the campus of the University of Minnesota for a regional library institute in October, 1937. The various sessions, which covered a period of four days, were held in the Continuation Center of the University. The faculty assembled for the institute by the University Library School included members of the university faculty, librarians, and library trustees from several states. More than four hundred librarians were in attendance. In the mornings they were divided into two groups, which met at the same hour to study specific library problems. The programs offered at afternoon and evening sessions were devoted to topics of a more general character, such as Books and Reading, Changing Literary Standards, and Changing Social Conditions. Questions and discussion constituted an important feature of every session. On the last day of the institute, the Minnesota Library Association and the North Dakota Library Association each held its annual meeting.

The in-service training of librarians, like the organization of other library activities, is increasingly being conducted on a regional basis. All the state library associations of New England accepted the invitation of the Vermont Library Association to join in a regional conference, which met in Manchester, Vermont, in June, 1938. Even more recently, a Tri-State Library Meeting was held in Cincinnati, Ohio. Mention has already been made of the San Francisco Bay District Library Discussion Group, which is a regional group within a state. During the current year this group has held four meetings to discuss "The Present Social Significance of the Library."

There is growing recognition, too, of the need for cooperation between libraries and other educational agencies. Not only are rural librarians, as individuals, learning to work in consultation with leaders of agricultural extension and home demonstration work, with vocational teachers, and with supervisors and teachers of rural schools, but also there is a marked tendency for library organizations to do something more than merely talk about "coordinated and integrated programs."

The Missouri Library Association has taken a forward step in this direction by planning to devote its annual meetings to consideration of the work of groups outside the library profession. At the 1937 meeting, agricultural extension was the theme, and the program was conducted chiefly by faculty members of the State College of Agriculture.

At a recent meeting of the Iowa Library Association, the librarian of the Iowa State College of Agriculture suggested that the Association plan the program for a future meeting around a study of rural communities. Moreover, he expressed the opinion that participation in the activities of the farm bureau should constitute an important part of the continuing education of librarians in an agricultural state. Finally, he urged rural librarians to follow the example of teachers by attending Saturday morning classes at the College of Agriculture, especially classes in rural psychology and sociology, adult education, public speaking, radio broadcasting, publicity, and journalism. As if in confirmation of the wisdom of this last piece of advice, a staff member of one of the state library commissions maintains that a summer course in rural sociology, which she took at a state college of agriculture, has been more useful to her in her library work than all her other college courses and her professional training combined.

In many of the smaller district and county meetings of librarians and library custodians, definite efforts are being made to relate the work of the libraries to that of other rural institutions. In Nebraska, for instance, the district library holds joint meetings with county home extension groups, women's clubs, parent-teacher associations, and other organizations. Such combined meetings are important because they contribute to the better understanding of common problems and also because the co-operating organizations subsequently support the libraries in their campaigns for more adequate funds.

The in-service training of librarians on the staff of the Tennessee Valley Authority includes participation in three important types of meetings: (1) conferences of T.V.A. librarians, (2) meetings of library associations in the seven states in which the T.V.A. operates, (3) conferences of educational supervisors, community teachers, and librarians, called by the Training Section of the T.V.A.

In Louisiana, agricultural agents meet with librarians and custodians of the Webster Parish Library at annual institutes and monthly conferences. The monthly news letters, which each parish librarian sends to branch library custodians, contain reports of school events in the parish as well as library reports, suggestions, and instructions. Learn-a-Library-Fact-a-Month is the slogan of the *Concordia News Notes*, in which library custodians of Concordia Parish find brief reviews of new books, quotations from radio talks, reports and plans from branch libraries, and helpful suggestions from the parish librarian.

Institutes of library custodians held in Winn, Grant, and Jackson Parishes, where the Tri-Parish Library Demonstration is being carried on, provide a most important means of informing members of the communities, library trustees, and school

officials about the purposes of the experiment and what it is accomplishing. Since in the future the enterprise will depend for its financial support upon taxes voted by the people of the three parishes and by the state legislature, the wisdom of keeping as many of the voters as possible fully informed of the progress of the libraries is obvious.

California librarians have found book-review meetings stimulating and helpful. In Los Angeles County, branch librarians and custodians meet bimonthly to talk over new books and exchange suggestions and opinions in regard to books that seem particularly adapted to the needs of individuals and groups having various special interests. Last year nearly nine hundred librarians attended these meetings, which, to quote one of the assistant county librarians, "proved to be the most exciting adventure of the year." "California Reading Lists" are compiled by the Los Angeles County Library for branch librarians, all of whom are cooperating in collecting historical material about their own neighborhoods for use in the county and state.

At an unusually interesting meeting of custodians in Alameda County, each custodian gave a brief talk about the products of the locality surrounding her library branch or station. One of the county library staff members drew a pictorial representation of each product on a large wall map. By studying the map, all gained a broader knowledge of the daily pursuits of the people whom they are serving and of the sources of the taxes that support the libraries.

EDUCATION OF LIBRARY TRUSTEES

With community conditions changing as rapidly as they do in rural sections, it would seem desirable that the library staff and trustees should meet together frequently to discuss some of the

problems to which these changes give rise. The librarian of the Lawson-McGhee Library of Knoxville, Tennessee, which serves Knox County, uses a sensible method of keeping the thirty-eight "squires" of the county board informed about the work and needs of the county library. Every few months several of the squires are invited to meet in the county librarian's office and accompany staff members on visits to school and community libraries and to book-wagon stops. The librarian believes that a significant phase of the educational work of any library is keeping trustees constantly in touch with library activities and interested in their jobs of trusteeship.

From the Huntsville Regional Library near the Guntersville Dam, in the T.V.A. area, the members of the library board accompany members of the educational staff and the librarians on frequent trips to libraries under their charge. By this means they seek to learn more about the interests of readers, to encourage reading, and to discover new and better methods of publicity.

NONPROFESSIONAL EDUCATION FOR LIBRARIANS

Two great obstacles to the progress of rural libraries in every section of the country are the low salaries paid to librarians and the lack of pensions for those who have grown old in the service. In general, the library salary scale is so low that librarians, without income from other sources, are denied the benefits that an occasional leave of absence for travel and advanced study would give them. And, since no provision is made for pensioning them, many of them are forced to continue their work when they are no longer able to discharge their duties satisfactorily or to make the adjustments that continually changing conditions require. For this situation library trustees and taxpayers are

largely responsible. Taxpayers have failed to provide the funds that would make suitable pensions for library workers possible; and trustees have frequently been reluctant to substitute a new librarian for a faithful but ineffectual veteran, even though they knew that by thus yielding to their human sympathies they were retarding the progress of the library and rendering its service to society less valuable. Unfortunately, it is not for their social acumen, but rather for their social prominence, that the majority of library trustees have been appointed in the past. It is encouraging to note here that the Trustees' Section of the American Library Association is creating higher standards in the quality of library trusteeship.

Better salaries and pensions for librarians are urgent needs of the profession. Scholarships or fellowships for travel and general study are also highly desirable. Undoubtedly, the broadening of the interests and sympathies of librarians would add greatly to their usefulness in their communities. Provincialism in their thinking is due in large measure to a lack of understanding of conditions foreign to their own experience. Reading alone can not always supply this lack. Fellowships of the kind recently established by the Detroit Public Library to enable the members of its staff to have the advantages of travel and nonprofessional study would probably prove more beneficial to most rural librarians than advanced professional training.

The very considerable contribution that library agencies are making to education in rural America is due, in large part, to the vision and influence of individual leaders. Manifestly, however, there is pressing need for a much greater number of librarians who possess wisdom and understanding, a wide knowledge of books, and the ready adaptability without which "the

good life" in small town and village—or anywhere else in the modern world, for that matter—is unattainable. Under the guidance of such librarians, the progress of rural libraries will be swift and sure, and the educational value of their services will be multiplied many times.

Concerning Book Selection

BOOK selection is one of the prime problems of librarians from every point of view—time, importance, difficulty. It is a problem that perplexes rural and urban librarians alike, though in some respects the difficulty decreases as the size of the book collection increases. When comparatively few books can be purchased, each book must represent a long-considered and deliberate choice.

Now that book reviews in magazines and newspapers are being read by many thousands of people the country over, and the influence of radio book talks upon reading tastes and habits is more and more prevalent, the differences between the demands of country readers and city readers, which were once fairly definite, are becoming blurred and in many localities disappearing entirely. The books that are talked about at grange meetings and at the supper table in the farm home are the topics of conversation during the city dinner hour.

County librarians, whose clientele includes both rural residents and the people of towns and cities, are in a position to give expert testimony on this point.

The librarian of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, speaking of her book-buying for Winnebago County, said: "I must know my com-

munity, rural and town, and there is very little difference in their book interests. That slight difference is rapidly shrinking; the reviews in all newspapers and magazines are responsible for that." Her assistant stressed the effect of radio book talks. "The home demonstration club members listen religiously to the Friday morning book reviews from Station WHA, and then we are swamped with demands," she reported.

"The rural resident reads about the same books as his city brother," commented the librarian of Hennepin County, Minnesota, basing her opinion on her conversations with men and women on the farms visited by the county book truck. The books that were most frequently asked for, she found, were those that had been reviewed over the radio or in periodicals.

The statement made by the Oshkosh librarian, "I must know my community," points to one advantage that rural librarians generally possess as compared with staff members of the book-buying departments of city libraries. Village librarians and the county library workers who travel about their territories in book wagons are more intimately in touch with their public than are most city librarians. Frequently, the rural librarian is indigenous. She—it is more often she than he—either has roots or takes root in the community life; she knows her neighbors, the school teachers, ministers, village board members; she belongs to local clubs, to the grange, and to a church; she participates in their dramatics, forums, community picnics, and other activities. Perhaps she builds a home or owns a farm. Theoretical discussions of "how to reach the people" are largely out of place among rural librarians; they are of the people.

Librarians on the book wagons, through their regular visits, establish much the same sort of intimate relationship with the

individuals who borrow the books. Confidences in regard to personal ambitions and interests and problems are always likely to develop out of consultation about the choice of books.

PERENNIAL PROBLEMS

Which specific books to buy, what general lines of demarcation to draw between purchases that are wise and those that are inadvisable are questions that are universally hard to answer. Everywhere among librarians there is a perennial argument concerning book selection. Some advocate a policy of buying books "that people want to read"; others maintain that public libraries should buy books "that people ought to read."

A fundamental difficulty confronts the librarians who follow the policy of buying only the books "that should be read": the standards of selection are necessarily determined, with whatever assistance can be commanded, by the persons who purchase the books rather than by those who are expected to read them.

Some of these librarians, probably the most inflexible ones, rely entirely upon their own judgment, or upon what they consider the most dependable lists of "best" books, when they make their selections. In so doing, they tend to forget the many individual differences, in both capacities and interests, among the people who use, or might use, public libraries. They overlook the fact that books which would be mere opiates to persons who are capable of reading with discrimination may serve as stepping stones to further and perhaps more profitable reading for the many others who have yet to experience true pleasure in reading or to learn that interesting ideas and useful information are to be found in print.

The tendency to buy "well-rounded" or "basic" collections of

books, particularly apparent in unified library systems in which the book purchases are made through a headquarters office, is another unfortunate manifestation of failure upon the part of librarians of the buy-what-is-good-for-them school of thought to take into account the varied interests of groups made up of persons with different tastes and capacities.

Librarians who, on the other hand, set their course too rigidly in the direction of buying books that people "want to read" are not destined to have smooth sailing. The difficulty of discovering what people's wants actually are is one of the rocks on which these librarians frequently come to grief.

It might be expected that helpful indications of popular reading interests could be obtained from an examination of the books that people own. Experience has proved that this expectation is not well founded.

A teacher of English in the high school of Shawano, Wisconsin, recently cooperated with the county librarian in an attempt to find out what books are owned in homes of the county. The books for adults, reported in the eighty questionnaires filled in by pupils from farm and village homes, included a high percentage of Bibles, catechisms, and songbooks, many in German, and a large number of mail order catalogues! Among the other books, popular titles of fifteen or twenty years ago predominated, with a sprinkling of a few recent novels.

When attics were emptied of books during the campaign of the American Library Association to obtain books for war camp libraries twenty years ago, it was thought that most of the "escape" fiction of an earlier generation came to light. But more attics have been ransacked during the W.P.A. and N.Y.A. drives for libraries in recent years, and again the popular books of the

late nineteenth century have been brought forth in astonishing numbers.

What might seem another likely source of help to librarians who are particularly concerned to find out what people want to read has also proved a disappointment. The reference is to numerous statistical studies of "farmers' reading," "housewives' reading," and the reading tastes of various other groups, which have recently been made. The conclusions reached in these studies leave out of the picture the multiple interests of the individuals who make up groups, interests that are often unrelated to occupation or social status. Consider, for instance, such unusual reading interests as were noted in a lately published report of the Antelope Valley Regional Branch of Los Angeles County: the cook who walked several miles to borrow a French grammar and books of biography and the minister who reads books on personnel management!

SOME SOLUTIONS

Between the two opposing camps of book selectors lies the middle ground upon which an increasing number of librarians now take their stand, neither assuming that people will remain for all time exactly as they are at present nor attempting to make them over according to some predetermined pattern. The policy that the middle-ground librarians pursue is one of helping people to discover their own interests and to give expression to them. These librarians also seek by various means, some of which have previously been discussed, to encourage the development of new interests. Their book collections are the tools with which they work and are fashioned, as far as possible, to achieve the ends desired.

In view of the divergence of opinion among librarians in regard to the wisest policy of book selection, the striking similarity in the reports of books borrowed from the rural libraries that were visited in connection with this study might appear strange, if one failed to remember that it is the readers and not the librarians who offer the final solution to the problem of book selection by deciding what books shall be read.

As anyone who is a student of human nature would surmise, works of fiction are at the top of the large majority of the lists. The preference for novels with local color has been noted in an earlier chapter. "Westerns" are mentioned in many of the reports. Happy endings are always popular. There are no surprises here. But a report of the librarian of Guntersville Dam, Alabama, contains an unexpected item. A study covering the reading of adult borrowers from the library during a six-month period disclosed the fact that men in clerical occupations led the list of fiction readers.

Works other than fiction, reported to be popular, cover almost all the classes into which librarians have divided nonfiction.

Biography, travel, economics, religion, and child care are the subjects specifically named by the librarian of Hennepin County, Minnesota. Books in German, French, Bohemian, and the Scandinavian languages are also in demand in her library.

Philosophy, cooperatives, and rural welfare are discussed by groups that meet in the Hunterdon County Library, New Jersey, and books on these subjects are much read. This library reports steadily increasing calls for nonfiction.

At one of the Winnebago County Library stations, in the village hall at Winneconne, Wisconsin, the custodian explained to me that her borrowers are constant readers of book reviews in

magazines and newspapers and want "the best of the new books." At another station, in a farmhouse in Waukau, the custodian, a member of the home bureau and the leader of a 4-H club, told of interest in books on politics and government. Here, an alcove of the family living room is the library, open all day and evening to the neighbors. "But they mostly come on Sundays when they drive in to church," said the librarian, "and take books home in bushel baskets."

The reports of reading in several of the migratory camps of California present evidence of a great variety of interests. According to the librarian of Kern County, the books read by the migratory workers in that county cover as wide a range as the reading done in any public library. One camp manager reported that among his group were readers of Karl Marx, Kirby Page, Sherwood Eddy, Clifford Odets, Paul Green, and Anna Rochester. *Rich Man, Poor Man* by Ryllis A. and Omar P. Goslin and *You Have Seen Their Faces* by Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White were in demand. The most popular books were those on economics, with facts presented in pictorial form. The magazine *Building America* was almost always being used by someone.

Pamphlets are used occasionally in rural libraries, but not nearly so extensively as in city libraries. Few rural librarians seem to realize that this "shirt-sleeve literature" would not only help to stretch their book funds but would also supply more up-to-date and readable information on current problems than is to be found in many books. The American Library Association has recognized the importance of this material by publishing lists of recommended "free and inexpensive pamphlets" in the *Booklist*. Similar lists are printed in the bulletins of many state

library agencies. The Hennepin County Library, Minnesota, and the Los Angeles County Library maintain unusually large active collections of pamphlets and clippings.

Special classes of readers create special problems for librarians. Men and women of limited education who find it difficult to get ideas from print should be supplied with books that are mature in content and point of view but as easy to read as books for young children. A parish librarian in Louisiana has suggested the following list of subjects on which books are needed for adults whose schooling ended with the third or fourth grade: health education, etiquette, home nursing, Bible stories (for preachers), stories about animals and pets.

In the southern states, librarians report that the selection of books for branch libraries that serve Negroes presents a great many difficulties. In Louisiana, books that describe the emancipated Negro are sometimes excluded from the school-community libraries for Negroes, "on the advice of the older Negro teachers themselves," the librarian says. In Mississippi the circulation of books that portray social equality between Negroes and whites is illegal.

To all librarians who keep closely in touch with their people, there comes word now and then of some special benefit from reading that has transformed the life of one or another of them. In these living testimonies, librarians find their reward for all the efforts they have made to choose books wisely and to see that the right books and the right readers are brought together. Sometimes a book is revealed as an answer to a pressing human need, sometimes as a key to a whole new world of ideas and activities. Every rural librarian knows and can tell stories of such revelations. Here are two of them.

The first one concerns a young Texan who had gone to California to work in the spinach fields, only to find when he arrived that the entire crop had been ruined by a winter storm. Far from home and confronted with the serious problem of unemployment for an indeterminate period, he went to the Santa Clara County Library and borrowed some books on automobile painting. He had once worked as a painter, but had done no work of that kind for several years. Through study of the books obtained from the library, he was enabled to get a job in a paint shop.

The second story tells of a man to whom the librarian of Hennepin County, Minnesota, communicated her enthusiasm for Ralph Borsodi's *Flight from the City*. Following up this interest, the man read all the books and pamphlets on cooperatives that he could find in the Minneapolis Public Library. Subsequently, he inspired a group of his friends to start a cooperative community in northern Minnesota.

Books in Motion

I HAVE twelve windows in my cabin, but your kind help has cut in a dozen extra ones that look out over all the world." It was books sent by parcel post that cut those extra windows in a lonely cabin, but it might just as well have been books carried into remote regions of the country by bookmobile or truck, or the contents of some pack-horse library brought to a mountain home. By whatever means they are conveyed to places far from libraries and cultural centers, books serve to widen the horizons of men and women who wait eagerly for the arrival of the postman or the traveling librarian.

BOOKS BY MAIL

Uncle Sam's dramatic role as messenger of education is unknown to most city dwellers who accept with indifference or annoyance the two or three daily deliveries of mail.

The rural mail routes in the United States, according to the Postmaster General's latest annual report, reach nearly twenty-six million individuals. Thus a high percentage of our total farm population, which numbers approximately thirty-two millions, is brought, potentially at least, within reach of library facilities by mail.

Reading courses by mail have been popular in this country since the organization, in 1878, of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, by the Chautauqua Institution of New York. The C.L.S.C. plan provided, and still provides, a four-year course of directed home reading. Hundreds of thousands of men and women have been enrolled in these courses, and it is estimated that twenty per cent of them have completed the reading cycles and received diplomas from Chautauqua.¹

When books were admitted to parcel post in 1913, the Wisconsin Free Library Commission offered to send to any individual in the state who was remote from public libraries any book he might request. There was no charge for the service; the payment of postage on the books was all that was required. The State Historical Library and the Library of the State University aided the Library Commission in this undertaking by offering their resources. Wide publicity was given to the new service by country newspapers and through notices displayed in country post offices, in rural schools, and at the places where farmers held their meetings. Both farmers and teachers were well represented in the first group of rural residents who took advantage of this opportunity, and the requests for books included a wide variety of subjects. Direct mail service to individuals soon reached a total of some four thousand books a year. Today that annual total approximates one hundred thousand. To borrowers who live in villages and on rural routes the books are sent direct; those who live in small towns where there are libraries receive their books through the local library, to which they are mailed by the Commission.

¹ J. S. Noffsinger, *Correspondence Schools, Lyceums, Chautauquas*, p. 109. Macmillan, 1926.

The Wisconsin Library Commission, the other state library agencies, and the county libraries all report a tremendous increase in the number of books borrowed since the special postal rate for libraries was inaugurated in 1928. This special rate is the result of a campaign organized by the National Association of Book Publishers. The American Library Association, the various state library agencies, and many educational organizations joined with the Publishers' Association in an appeal to Congress for a book rate similar to the second-class rate granted to periodicals and newspapers. The rate obtained applies only to books sent by public libraries or nonprofit organizations or returned to them by readers. It has, however, made possible the saving of thousands of dollars annually, thus benefiting both the libraries and their readers, especially in rural districts.

In response to hundreds of requests from men and women for books dealing with vocational and practical matters and for books to help them supplement their education, individual reading courses on special subjects have been developed into an important feature of the mail service of the Wisconsin Library Commission. Every course is adapted to the particular needs and capacities of the individual reader to whom it is sent. The "Reading with a Purpose" pamphlets, which the American Library Association began to issue in 1925, were used as a foundation for many of the courses. All courses are kept up to date by the addition of new books.

Courses in personality development and in psychology are in great demand. Requests are received almost daily for courses in English, astronomy, archaeology, world affairs, music, and "farm life." There is unfailing interest in consumers' cooperatives, international relations, conservation, and consumer edu-

cation. Vocational subjects in which courses are asked for include photography, carpentry, dairy inspection, journalism, steam engineering, forestry, cabinet work, radio engineering, mechanical drawing, horticulture, and landscaping. Farmers again and again ask for books on Diesel engines. Many men and women take reading courses to help them prepare for civil service examinations. Case records kept at the Traveling Library Department indicate that many persons have done consistent reading over a period of several years.

Farm women frequently apply for courses for several members of the family. One woman wrote: "There are five adults in the family wishing books. One would like you to arrange a reading course on Antarctica; and please send books by the following authors for the other four: Selma Lagerlöf, Bess Streeter Aldrich, Will James, Sigrid Undset, Sinclair Lewis, Emerson Hough, B. M. Bower, Zane Grey."

A mother, needing help with the education of her children, sent this appeal: "I am the mother of two children, aged three and a half and five years, respectively, living in a rural village where the school has no kindergarten. I am an ex-teacher and should appreciate your assistance in outlining a reading course and sending the books that will enable me to help my children enjoy games and stories and any constructive activities, such as those taught in Wisconsin kindergartens."

The continuance of school studies in middle age is a serious matter with hundreds of ambitious farm people. Here is an excerpt from a letter that describes a situation in which many farm women find themselves: "I wonder if you would plan reading courses in personal development for me. I am forty years old. My daughter is now in high school, and I seem to have a

little time every day for reading. I did not have a chance to finish grammar school. If possible, I would like to study so that I would have at least a high school knowledge."

A man asking for a course in geology and mineralogy wrote: "It seems as if there are far too many books to choose from, and yet the real thing is hard to find. You may be able to prepare a reading course to help me." In answer to this request, the University Library is being drawn upon to supplement the collection of the Traveling Library. In seven months the man has read eight books from the lists compiled for him.

A request from northern Wisconsin should be of particular interest to educators of adults. It said: "I wish to obtain information for work in all phases of adult education. I am especially interested in the philosophy of adult education and elementary psychology. I will also greatly appreciate any information about work in connection with the naturalization of aliens and would like books on simple business English and accounting for groups of adults with an average of fifth grade elementary school education."

Appreciation for rescue from isolation, which was so tellingly expressed in the letter quoted at the opening of this chapter, characterizes many of the letters that are received. Here is a passage from one of them: "I am as near being a shut-in as a healthy human can be. The Traveling Library has not only furnished me with amusement; the 'Reading with a Purpose' courses have been instructive as well as interesting. Last but not least, the librarians are able to anticipate what interests me if I do not give them definite information on what I want."

Many state agencies cooperate with the Free Library Commission of Wisconsin both in the provision of the reading courses

and in the sending of books by mail. The Juvenile Department of the State Board of Control sends reading lists to children's boards and to case workers. The Bureau of Maternal and Child Health of the Wisconsin State Board of Health has sent a "demonstration trailer" through the state. A circular, entitled "How To Borrow Books by Mail," which is distributed in rural communities from the trailer, contains lists of books on the physiology and hygiene of marriage, care during pregnancy and at birth, child care, and home nursing. In addition to stimulating a demand for these books, the Bureau has obtained a grant for the Traveling Library Department for the purchase of additional copies of them. The books that the director of the Rehabilitation Department of the State Vocational Board prescribes for his teachers and students are chosen in consultation with the reference librarian of the State Traveling Library Department. Hundreds of requests for books were received by the Traveling Library Department, following the publication in the *Wisconsin Agriculturist and Farmer* of lists of "Books for the Family's Winter Reading." One letter said: "We live on a farm with woods all round and are snowed in for the winter. We get lonesome for good reading material. When I saw in the *Wisconsin Agriculturist and Farmer* the list of books I could get by paying the postage, I was overjoyed."

More than twelve thousand package libraries on three thousand subjects were mailed by the Extension Division of the University of Wisconsin last year to people in eleven hundred communities, of which eighty-two per cent were without public libraries. The services of the Extension Division and of the Traveling Library Department of the Library Commission are carefully correlated by means of daily conferences between the

staffs of the two organizations. Requests that are to be answered with books are cared for by the Traveling Library Department, while many requests for current material are filled by the University Extension Division through its package libraries of clippings and pamphlets. All announcements and study aids of the Extension Division refer students to the Traveling Library Department if books for their courses are not available in local libraries.

In Wisconsin, as in other states, the help of W.P.A. workers has enabled state library agencies to keep many books in service to meet increased demands "by mending them to the limit of possible use; but necessary withdrawals are badly depleting the book stock." Replacement of worn-out books is impossible without sufficient book funds, and thousands of individuals who are eager for books must wait their turn in this reading-course service by mail.

In Oregon, reading courses were inaugurated by the state library in 1932, as a means of making further education possible for unemployed young people who could not afford to go to college or take commercial correspondence courses. The idea was first presented by the state librarian to a conference of more than fifty representatives of state educational agencies. Grange leaders, superintendents of rural schools, ministers and church workers, college presidents and instructors, directors of radio programs, and other leaders enthusiastically approved the plan and offered assistance in giving it publicity throughout the state.

A printed list of more than five hundred subjects on which courses were requested in the first years of the service indicates a wide diversity of interest, but requests for books on vocational subjects predominate. According to statistics compiled by the

state library, less than ten per cent of the 4,578 courses sent out during the first three years were dropped before completion. Some students have taken three or four courses.

All applicants for courses are asked to send to the state library details about their education, occupation, special interests, and experience. This information is necessary because each applicant is treated individually in prescribing a course. The "prescription" is in the form of a personal letter, briefly describing the books recommended and telling why they are included in the course. These letters are not mere book lists; each of them is more like the friendly talk that might be given to the applicant in a personal interview by a readers' adviser. Five or six books are usually suggested, and the first book is sent with the letter. Books for subsequent reading are carefully reserved in advance of the date for which they are assigned and are mailed at intervals of four weeks.

One of the chief reasons for questioning the educational value of reading courses by mail is that the solitary student may have no opportunity to talk over his reading with others or to exchange ideas and information about the subject of the course. But Oregon experience has shown that reading-course study need not always be solitary. It is not unusual for several members of a family, or a group of friends in a community, to read together and discuss what they have read. Often, too, study begun alone leads to further work in the field chosen, with the aid of an instructor and in company with other students.

Five members of one family in an Oregon village of about a thousand inhabitants have taken twelve courses and have interested a neighbor in enrolling. Repeatedly in the records of readers occur the names of brothers and sisters, parents and children,

husbands and wives, who are taking courses at the same time, doubtless studying at the same table in the farmhouse. In these circumstances, they must have a sense of comradeship in their endeavors, and yet they show marked independence and individuality in their choice of courses. One of two sisters who enrolled together is taking a course in nursing; the other a course in drawing. A mother is enjoying a course in literary criticism while her son studies aviation. A farmer reads books on salesmanship; his wife is interested in home decoration; their daughter is taking a course in landscape gardening.

In the preparation of the reading courses, authoritative book lists and the curricula of schools and colleges are used as guides, and the heads of departments in the State University and State College are consulted in their special fields. But each reading course sent out is carefully adapted to the interests, previous education, and experience of the individual reader.

There is considerable variation in the amount and kind of formal education that the applicants have had. About one third of them have been graduated from high school, and a number of them have had further education or training. In the requests for courses and in the letters of appreciation received by the state library, the ambition to acquire more education is expressed again and again.

A housewife, who lives in a community of seventy people, bravely starts out with the request: "I would like to begin with the first year of high school subjects and continue through all four years, taking subjects that are now required in high school. For a foreign subject, I would prefer German, but if Latin is necessary, I will be glad to study it."

A woman who has completed high school, and after a half

year in normal school has taught in rural schools for nine years, writes of her "lifetime in a rural community" and of her desire "to lead rural women's clubs and improve home conditions for rural children."

A request for a course in short-story writing comes from a woman who has had two years of normal school and two previous reading courses.

Of the four thousand courses prepared in the years 1934 and 1935, nearly fifteen hundred were for men in C.C.C. camps and more than four hundred for men in the State Penitentiary. Many of these men were, of necessity, barred from the use of community libraries, but, even exclusive of them, there is a surprising number of men enrolled for reading courses.

Probably one of the chief factors in the strong appeal that reading courses make to both men and women is purely psychological. Undoubtedly, it is easier to confide problems and perplexing experiences to a friendly person not too close at hand than to approach a librarian at her desk, where she is busy with many duties that look formidable, surrounded by other applicants for her attention, answering other requests, and possibly looking harassed and preoccupied. The readers' adviser in city libraries, with an office or desk in some secluded corner, and with a schedule of duties planned to allow complete and interested attention to the needs of each inquirer, receives confidences that are seldom given to other members of the library staff. The "mail-order librarian" offers the same kind of single-minded consideration to the problems of the individual reader.

The public libraries of Oregon distribute announcements of the reading courses and promote the project in other ways. In one small community the librarian enrolled forty-three students

from the surrounding country. Some of the larger libraries prepare reading courses for their own readers.

Unfortunately, insufficient funds, the obstacle that has been seen to halt the progress of rural library services everywhere, limit the usefulness of libraries and library agencies in Oregon. That point is specifically made in the "Biennial Report of the Oregon State Library," covering the period from July 1, 1934, to June 30, 1936. The report says in part:

It is significant that the increased number of novels lent was less than the increased number of books in either the useful or the fine arts. In other words, the demand for desultory reading has not kept pace with the growing demand for books of a technical and business nature, nor for books covering economic and social problems. If the increases are reduced to percentages, a gain of almost 50 per cent is noted in the use of books on business, trades, skills, or crafts, and an increase of almost 40 per cent in the use of books on current problems, economic and social.

While there is cause for rejoicing in the increased use of these books, it is to be regretted that all too often requests could not be filled because the library was unable to purchase enough copies to keep up with the demand.

In view of the great eagerness for books that is manifested by men and women in rural districts, it seems literally tragic that a report such as this should be typical of library reports throughout the country.

In Vermont the "Church Reading List," which is circulated under the sponsorship of the Congregational Woman's Missionary Society of Vermont, is one of the greatest incentives to reading in rural communities. No certificates or awards are offered, such as a number of state library agencies and some county libraries issue for reading from approved lists; but there is great rivalry among the various churches for recognition as "the

church having most readers in proportion to membership." The name of the winning church is read at the annual meeting of the Society in September. In its printed list, the Society states that the books may be borrowed by mail from the Vermont Library Commission in Montpelier; from the Library of the Vermont Council of Religious Education in South Ryegate; from the Congregational Library in Boston; or from local libraries through interlibrary loans.

The list includes a wide selection of books of general interest as well as books on religion. Under the heading "Christian Citizenship and Social Service" are listed such titles as *A Primer for Consumers* by Benson Landis; *Middletown in Transition* by Robert and Helen Lynd; and *Vanishing Markets and Our World Trade* by Theodore Schultz. An individual record blank is furnished with each list, with the note "Books *must* be selected from four *different* groups to make a Qualified Reader." The obvious purpose of this ruling is to cultivate interest in various fields of literature.

Even in Arizona, a state with no official state library organization, any individual may borrow books by mail from the State University. With no state agency for the specific purpose of promoting reading, the library facilities of the University are not used to any great extent, but several hundred books are mailed every year to groups and to individuals, chiefly clubwomen, ministers, professional men, and university extension students. If federal or state aid were available for expansion and promotion of such centralized library resources in Arizona and in other states, the opportunity to obtain books and reading courses by mail might be offered to the entire rural population of the United States.

A useful book-lending service to rural ministers in the South

has been conducted, with the help of a grant made by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, since September, 1936, by the library of the School of Religion of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. Nearly two thousand ministers of rural churches, in twenty-seven states, have borrowed books by mail. Eighteen denominations have been served. More than twelve thousand books were circulated in the first year the library was available. The majority of readers are between thirty and forty years of age. The books most frequently requested are the latest publications on social and religious problems, which are used in the preparation of sermons. "Social problems" must be interpreted very broadly, the librarian warns, because the books asked for under that heading treat of a great variety of subjects, from family and sex relationships to consumers' cooperation. Appreciative letters from ministers who have availed themselves of the service attest its usefulness.

Many young men preparing for the ministry receive books from the Berea College Library, which through its extension department serves eight states of the Appalachian region. This extension service places collections of books in rural homes and stores for use during the winter months; school libraries are supplemented by loans of books, stereoscopes, and views, and by gifts of books, papers, and magazines; duplicate books and magazines that are given to the College Library are passed on as gifts to other colleges, to schools, Sunday Schools, and the pack-horse libraries in the southern mountain territory. Students of the Berea College Opportunity School, held each year in January, become library users and later borrow books from the extension service for use in their homes and schools.

A specialized library service that has operated for many years

is maintained for physicians and nurses by the American Hospital Association in Chicago. Package libraries of books, pamphlets, and clippings are mailed to hospitals in rural communities and to individual doctors and nurses in small towns and in the country. As many libraries and state library agencies do not buy medical books to any extent and libraries in hospitals and schools for nurses are still in a pioneer stage, this source of books is extremely important to country doctors and nurses who wish to continue their professional education.

Librarians themselves say that book service by mail, even at its best, is only a makeshift, because every reader should have an opportunity to browse among the books in a complete and well-organized library. However, the very multiplicity of offerings in libraries, small as well as large, may confuse and bewilder a person who is unskilled in the use of a library. A single book delivered by the rural mail carrier may, on the contrary, bring the solution to some difficult problem or open new realms of thought.

BOOKMOBILES

"No better method has been devised for reaching the dweller in the country," wrote Mary L. Titcomb, librarian of the Washington County Free Library in Hagerstown, Maryland, in her account of the first book wagon, which started on its travels to country stations and homes in 1907. That wagon, drawn by two horses, was the predecessor of the modern book automobile, or bookmobile, used now in many states to take books to people in outlying districts. "The book goes to the man, not waiting for the man to come to the book," continued Miss Titcomb in explaining the importance of her innovation. "Psychologically,

too, the wagon is the thing. As well try to resist the pack of the peddler from the Orient as the shelf full of books when the doors of the wagon are opened at one's gateway. Much more is accomplished than the mere circulation of books. Human relations are established. Many a mother has the wagon woman to thank for bringing to her the ministrations of the public health nurse. Many a child has been saved from adenoids, weak eyes, or other ailments because of the observing eye and practical helpfulness of the library worker. In countless ways, the visit of the wagon becomes a blessing. To drive a book wagon is an all-round job, but one that brings its own reward in the respect and affection won."¹

Other states followed the example of Maryland. Euphemia Corwin, the former librarian of Berea College, after reading an article about the Washington County book wagon, written by Miss Titcomb and published in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1915, decided that the Berea College Library must have a book wagon for its extension service. She made a trip to New York and interested a number of friends of the College in financing the project. It was the proudest day of her life, Miss Corwin says, when the wagon was stocked with books and magazines and started up into the Kentucky hills.

Vermont was another of the states that adopted the book-wagon idea. Miss Titcomb had been a library organizer in Vermont and secretary of the first library commission in that state. Members of the Vermont Federation of Women's Clubs, having heard of her book wagon, saved money enough in little dime banks to buy a wagon for service to rural Vermonters. This first

¹ Mary L. Titcomb, *Washington County Free Library, 1901-1931*, p. 15-16. Hagerstown, Md.

Vermont book wagon was given to the Library Committee of the State Department of Education in 1925. The book wagon now used by the Vermont Library Commission is also a Federation gift. Each of the new regional libraries in the state also uses a book wagon for deliveries to rural stations and schools and to cooperating libraries.

Book automobiles and trailers are in use today in very many states. Ohio, for instance, employs a fleet of bookmobiles in the expanded rural library service that has been made possible by state aid. New York City has a bookmobile on Staten Island. Other city libraries, as well as county libraries, regional libraries, and state library agencies, have found bookmobiles to be a most effective means not only of reaching people in outlying districts, but also of giving publicity to library service. The cars with outside shelves, glass doors, and brightly painted signs are attractive advertisements for books as they travel along country roads.

In California, with its well-developed county library system radiating from large central collections into every section of the state, the only book wagon in use is the Ventura County Library truck, which maintains a rigorous daily schedule to ranch houses, oil fields, rural schools, and library branches and stations. Five members of the library staff of fourteen take the truck and the library sedan into the country, carrying books, pamphlets, phonograph records, pictures, posters, films, and motion picture projectors. The truck has shelves that open outside, storage space inside, and a desk formed by the backboard of the car. When the car is parked and the librarians are receiving and giving out books at one of the stops after ranch working hours, camp chairs are placed around the car, the electric bulbs along the

shelves are lighted, and a friendly "library atmosphere" is created.

In this county on the edge of the Pacific Ocean, westerns are still in demand. Many men ask for books containing technical information on such subjects as gold mining and the oil industry. There is in Ventura County a large population of Spanish-speaking descendants of the early settlers of California, to whom the truck carries books in Spanish.

One of the ranch houses where the truck stops is a station for forest rangers. The men come on horseback to meet the library car, bringing their books for exchange. A filling station on a mountain trail, instead of being a truck stop, houses a small library. A group of families in the vicinity rejected the offer of a book-truck stop on the ground that they wanted a branch library that would be open twenty-four hours a day. They now have it. Notwithstanding a special instance such as this, the Ventura County librarian believes that book-truck service in the hands of a trained librarian is always superior to a small collection of books left in a library station, "indifferently administered."

With an adequate staff, weekly or semimonthly truck visits to every section of Ventura County are possible. However, since the territory covered is extensive and the routes are separated by mountains, a second truck is badly needed to facilitate service. Many stops are nearly a day's journey from the county library.

In Louisiana a bookmobile is an essential feature of the Tri-Parish Library Demonstration. The bookmobile routes cover as much as possible of the rural sections of Winn, Grant, and Jackson Parishes. The home demonstration groups in Grant Parish are responsible for a new route, added in order that members of their group may be served. The routes are announced in

the newspapers. Sharecroppers and others who do not read newspapers hear about the free book service from their neighbors.

The Tri-Parish bookmobile travels approximately fifteen hundred miles a month, making from three to four hundred stops at homes, stores, schools, and filling stations. In good weather, a card table and camp stools are set up near the car when it stops so that people can look over the books and make their selections in leisurely comfort.

In the crowd that comes are lumberjacks, mothers with babies in arms, rural school teachers, old men walking with canes, boys and girls who hurry to help the librarian lower the sides of the car and open the bookshelves. There are no Negroes among them because it is thought that the supply of books is insufficient for the thirty thousand white people of the three parishes.

Some borrowers have to walk two or three miles to reach the library car because it can not cover all the roads in the territory. "Naw, I don't need to tell people about the bookmobile; for miles around you can see them coming with books in their hands," one old man told the librarian of the Tri-Parish Demonstration, emphasizing his remarks by alarming gestures with a double-barreled shotgun that he carried. "I just take the gun along in case a rabbit or a squirrel happens up," he added, setting her mind at rest in regard to his intentions.

The needs of the rural people in the three parishes, as indicated by their requests for books, are predominantly practical. Books on farming are in continuous use, both those that contain general information on the subject and those that deal with specialized occupations, such as small vegetable growing, bee-keeping, and frog raising. During the first weeks of the Library Demonstration, there were calls for books on canning and pre-

serving, needlework, painting, aeronautical engineering, professional boxing, how to destroy termites, how to sell real estate, how to prepare and sell manuscripts, how to make lawn furniture, interior decoration, house planning, city planning, Louisiana history, plays, and general literature. In view of the high percentage of illiteracy in Louisiana, this list is impressive.

Some of the Tri-Parish borrowers are taking university extension courses, some are members of W.P.A. classes, others are reading to obtain the certificates granted by the State Library Commission. Many have said that they prefer bookmobile service to small branch libraries, which are sometimes difficult to reach and are not always in charge of competent librarians.

The Minneapolis Public Library is advertised to residents of the city and of Hennepin County as "Your Biggest Consumers' Co-op." Through contract with this library, every resident of Hennepin County has access to seven hundred thousand books, a collection of more than a million pamphlets and clippings, a music collection, a special collection for teachers and parents, and a readers' advisory service. Three days a week, winter and summer, the county librarian and her driver-assistant deliver books by truck to small branch libraries, to schools, and to farmhouses along the roads. The schedule is announced in advance by post card, and, if the truck is not on hand at the expected time, the rural telephones along the route start to buzz with inquiries as to where it is and when it will arrive. People are usually waiting at their doors with armfuls of books to be returned; some carry them out to the truck in baskets or dishpans. Twenty or thirty stops are made in one day; and the books distributed, including deliveries to schools and branch libraries, mount up to a daily total of four or five hundred.

A day on the Hennepin County book truck was an enlighten-

ing experience. Most of the stops were at farm homes, one was at a filling station, three were at country schools. At the first school, both the children and the teachers came out with book lists in their hands. The teachers were reading books from the lists compiled by Dora Smith of the Minnesota University School of Education. Dr. Smith's lists exert a strong influence upon the reading of Minnesota teachers, we were told by a rural school supervisor, whom we found visiting the second school at which we stopped. "Will you make up book exhibits based on those lists for my ten district training centers?" she asked the county librarian. This second school had only one room, in which about thirty children, divided into six groups corresponding to six grades of a city school, were being taught by one teacher. There are eighty-six one-room schools of this kind in Hennepin County. Many of them are on routes of the book truck, and some of their libraries are used by parents as well as by pupils and teachers of the school. This was true of the community library housed in the third school building that we visited. There was a separate entrance to the library, which was open every day and two evenings a week for the use of both adults and children.

The stops made at homes were especially interesting. The first one was at the home of a rural minister, whose wife took nine books for herself and her children. She asked for books by Rufus Jones and books on Hebrew life.

At the next stop, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, the book so often asked for in libraries but so seldom obtained because it is always "out," was actually delivered to a farmer's wife, whose name had long been on the waiting list for it. The librarian asked her to read it as quickly as she could and then pass it along to a neighbor down the road.

The fiction that seemed to be in most constant demand was

westerns. One woman took an armful of them for her husband. At the filling station where we made a stop, members of five families were waiting for the truck, and westerns were again the books in which the greatest interest was shown. But, by no means all these rural readers are intent upon galloping and shooting their way out of the monotony of the repetitive details that make up daily life. On the contrary, many of the books asked for were obviously wanted because they promised assistance in dealing with everyday duties and problems. One mother took several books on child training; another asked for books on sex education that would help her to answer the questions of two young sons. A farmer asked permission to keep Stuart Chase's *Rich Land, Poor Land* a little longer and borrowed a book on poultry raising and one on field crops. His third choice—white hyacinths to feed the soul—was an anthology of poetry!

Volumes on travel and biography were chosen at another home, and a book on Europe published in 1933 was refused as being out of date. An elderly couple, living in a cottage surrounded by a grove of trees, returned a book by Roy Chapman Andrews and borrowed *Trailing Cortez through Mexico* by H. A. Franck. Their selection is usually guided, the librarian explained, by a daughter who teaches in Oregon and who keeps her parents informed of books that she thinks will interest them.

The books read aloud every morning from Station WOI at Ames, Iowa, and the book reviews broadcast from the same station in the afternoons were responsible for a number of the requests made. Book reviews in the *Christian Century* were faithfully followed by the minister's wife mentioned earlier.

Interest in cooperatives is strong in Minnesota, where many of the people trace their ancestry to the Scandinavian countries.

An omniverous reader in one home detained us for a long conversation in which she told of her husband's founding of a farmers' cooperative. The son of a near-by neighbor, she said, had spent an entire summer reading books on cooperation.

Though they sometimes lengthen the day's work, it is these personal contacts and friendly conversations that make the book-truck service so valuable. But, however interesting and rewarding to the librarian this service may be, it is unquestionably difficult work when one person serves as truck driver, book carrier, record clerk, and confidential readers' adviser as well. Nevertheless, many librarians not only attempt to discharge this combination of duties, but actually make a great success of it, taking the book truck into the country for three, four, or five trips a week. Naturally, with two persons on the job, more stops can be made, and there is more time for drawing out and noting personal requests and for offering helpful comments on the books.

To What End?

BOOKS. Books by the dozens, the hundreds, the thousands, the hundreds of thousands. Books in libraries and library stations, in farm homes, in mountain cabins, in schools, in stores, in filling stations, in camps. Books for children, for young people, for the mature, for the aged. Books for those who read widely and well and books for those to whom the deciphering of a printed page offers almost insuperable difficulties. Books passed from hand to hand; sent by mail; carried by messenger on foot or on horseback; brought by wagon, by truck, and by car. Books lent, books given, books rented, books bought. Books read over the air, books reviewed, books discussed. Books as an accompaniment to daily morning tasks, books as a topic of conversation at social gatherings in the afternoon, books as a means of education in the evening when the day's work is done. Books on farming, on cooking, on the care of children. Books of science, of art, of drama and poetry. Books on philosophy and psychology and education and economics and religion. Books of history, of travel, of exploration. Biographies and autobiographies. And stories. Countless stories of love and adventure and mystery. Stories of human entanglements, always singularly alike in essentials, but infinitely varied in details and in the manner of telling.

Such are the books that one sees and hears of in rural America.

From this catalogue alone one can gather most of the answers to the questions one wants to ask.

Do the people of rural America read? Manifestly, the answer is that they do.

Are these people eager for books? Rural librarians tell of men and women who walk miles to meet the book truck that serves them; of others who wait anxiously for the postman who brings them their library packages; of borrowers who carry away armfuls of books from the bookmobile, or fill dishpans and bushel baskets with their reading for a week. Rural people vote library taxes and carry on campaigns for additional funds to finance their library services. Those that are more prosperous give what they can. And everywhere one hears of book supplies that are insufficient to meet the demands. Yes, rural people are hungry for books. They read with avidity, when they can get books.

To what end do they read? This, the most important question of all in a study of the significance of rural library services, calls for a multiple answer. For it is not one end but many ends that rural people seek, and sometimes attain, through their reading.

They read for understanding of themselves and of others. They read for knowledge of the past and of the present and for intelligent surmises as to the probable future. They read to improve their economic and social standing, to increase their efficiency in their work, to brighten their hours of leisure. They read for beauty and inspiration, for comfort and companionship. They read for entertainment and for temporary escape from the world of reality. They turn to books as a source of new ideas and as a stimulus to new activities. In short, the purposes for which people in rural America read today are as varied as those of readers at all times and in all places.

To what extent any one of these purposes is actually achieved,

or what of educational value is derived from the reading done, obviously depends in each instance upon the particular book and the particular reader. Neither observation nor experience gives good ground for the belief that the reading of fiction is not educative and the reading of nonfiction invariably is. Perhaps it is more justifiable to draw a line between the books that are read for escape from reality or for sheer entertainment and those from which readers seek to obtain information, understanding, inspiration. However, in this matter it seems wiser to refrain from generalization altogether.

In the rural library work that was seen and the facts that were gathered in the course of this study, a trend in the direction of more deliberate and pronounced educational activity is clearly discernible. The consolidation and consequent strengthening of library resources; the mutually helpful cooperation between libraries and other agencies not only in getting books to readers and attracting readers to books, but also in seeing that each reader shall have books adapted to his needs, capacities, and interests; the eager seizing by librarians of every opportunity to continue their own education, professional and nonprofessional; their ceaseless efforts to procure more adequate financial support in order that library services may be improved and extended, all furnish convincing proof that rural librarians today are genuinely concerned with the educational effects of their work.

In intention, and often by virtue of accomplishment, our rural libraries are entitled to a place among the American institutions that are devoted to the advancement of learning and the enrichment of living.

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